

Anthology of Mystery and Suspense

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Contents

THE DESPERATE HOURS Page 7

By Joseph Hayes

PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE

HEATHER MARY. Page 103

By J. M. Scott

PUBLISHED BY E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

TO CATCH A THIEF Page 225

By David Dodge

PUBLISHED BY RANDOM HOUSE

BEYOND THIS PLACE Page 317

By A. J. Cronin

PUBLISHED BY LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY

BLACK WIDOW Page 453

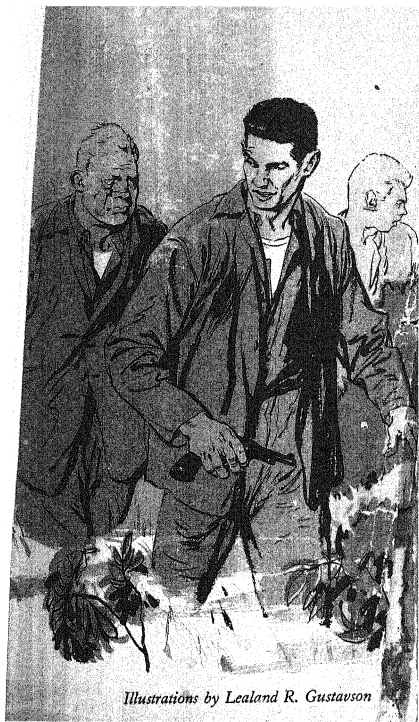
By Patrick Quentin

PUBLISHED BY SIMON AND SCHUSTER

SPOVER: TOKYO Page 559

By John P. Marquand

PUBLISHED BY LITTLE, BROWN & COMPANY



Illustrations by Lealand R. Gustavson

The DESPERATE HOURS

A condensation
of the book by
JOSEPH HAYES

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WHEN Eleanor Hilliard answered the doorbell on that quiet fall afternoon, she never suspected who the shy young man on the porch could be. She never guessed that the next three days would be filled with terror and despair for herself, for Dan, her husband, and for Cindy and Ralphie, their two children.

Deputy Sheriff Jesse Webb, grimly hunting three ruthless escaped convicts, knew what that stranger on the porch could mean. What he didn't know was that the Hilliards' house had been chosen; nor could he find any sure way to bring their nightmare to an end.

The Desperate Hours is a novel of extraordinary suspense. What happened to the Hilliards could happen to any of us.

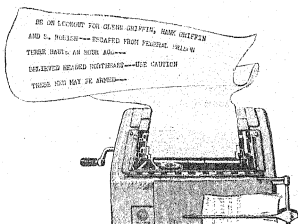
What would you have done in their place?

"Convincing and spellbinding . . ."

—Lewis Gannett in the
New York Herald Tribune

"Don't begin it after midnight unless you have company."

—C. V. Terry in *The New York Times*



THEY EMERGED from the woods a few minutes after dawn, a cold, moist dawn with a mist billowing up from the fields. There were three of them, their uniforms blending with the yellowing autumn green. They paused only briefly, scanning the deserted highway that lay flat across the flat Midwestern country. At a signal from one—the tall, lean, young-looking man who walked slightly ahead of the other two, with his head tilted and his shoulders lifted at a defiant and slightly triumphant angle—they proceeded swiftly, but not running, behind a screen of trees and underbrush, in a line parallel to the highway. In a very short time, and before anyone else appeared on the road, they reached a farm. In the barn lot, one detached himself from the others, moving quickly, a small young man, even younger than the tall one but without the other's jaunty manner, and began to work on the wires under the hood of the late-model, gray-colored sedan parked there. The other two moved swiftly but with stealth toward the barn. Inside, they came upon an elderly farmer, wearing blue overalls, shifting with pail and stool from one cow to another. The shorter of the two men—who was middle-aged and slower, but powerful-looking, with the ponderous, forward-leaning gait of a bear—picked up an axe handle and stepped across the straw-littered concrete floor. Before the startled farmer

"She moved last week to Pittsburgh. If they can't locate her in Indianapolis, it'll take the heat off."

"Where the hell we heading then?"

"Indianapolis," Glenn said quietly. "I got some business there, remember? But we're not walking into a roadblock from the west, pal. We'll circle around and come in from the northeast."

"Then what?"

"Then we'll find us a cozy spot. And I'll contact Helen."

"A cozy spot—like where?"

"You name it, Robish. Only no hangouts. They'll be watching all of them. Pick a nice quiet house on a nice quiet street on the edge of town with no other houses close by. Make it a big place with soft furniture. Comfortable, scared people. Someplace to take the stir-taste out of our mouths."

"Then what?"

"We wait till Helen gets there from Pittsburgh. Now shut up, Robish; let a guy enjoy his freedom."

In the back seat Hank heard Robish swear under his breath. Hank had to hand it to Glenn: he could certainly handle Robish. Robish had complained about not carrying a gun: it made him feel helpless. Glenn had said they couldn't afford to pull a job and tip off their whereabouts; besides, Glenn had one, didn't he? A .38 revolver, taken from a guard now in the prison infirmary with a bump on his head. Relax, Robish, and enjoy yourself.

Hank was picturing a house such as Glenn had described. After the clank of lock, the concrete floors and metal bunks, he was imagining himself sinking down again into a soft chair, his feet planted on deep-tufted carpet, the warm and intimate reality of ordinary walls with framed pictures on them.

THE HILLIARDS' house on Kessler Boulevard, while fairly convenient to shopping centers and bus lines, was remote enough from other homes to give the family a sense of privacy. In the eight years that they had occupied the house, they had come, without any of them ever being quite aware of it, to love every corner, stairstep and shingle. True, the furniture showed some evidence of wear and tear by two growing youngsters. Cindy, who was now nineteen, thought they should replace the living-room suite as soon as possible, but her mother, Eleanor, wasn't just sure. Even though they could get a discount because Dan was

now personnel manager of the largest department store in town, Eleanor argued that these were inflationary times and the furniture *was* comfortable. Besides, as she pointed out to Dan, Cindy might be getting married soon.

As Dan came down the stairs at 7:40 on this particular Wednesday morning, he was trying to look ahead to the office rather than give in to the nagging uncertainty he had begun to feel about his daughter. Not that he had anything against Charles Wright. Perhaps, he chided himself, only a banked-down sort of envy. Dan had had to work for everything, every cent. Without an education past the second year in high school, he had come to this. And he was proud. On the other hand, Charles Wright, or Chuck—as Cindy had come to call him after going to work as secretary in the law office where young Wright was already a junior partner—had had it all handed to him, everything easy. He was lucky. But he was also, Dan knew from hearsay, an irresponsible young man, more interested in fast sports cars, beautiful girls and wine-drenched parties than in finding a solid place for himself in the community. Very well then, Dan was acting like a typical father or, as Cindy had chided, “a conservative old fogey.”

In the kitchen Ralphie, who dawdled over breakfast as though it were some sort of punishment for past crimes, was glaring at a half-full glass of milk. He looked up when Dan came in. Eleanor, small, blond and still slender, smiled and placed Dan's steaming ham and eggs at his place, then sat down across from him.

“Lucille is sick,” she announced, explaining the absence of the maid who usually came on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

“Again?” Dan said. “Any gin missing?”

Ralphie lifted his eyes from the milk and grinned. “She's probably blotto,” he said sagely.

“Where does he learn his language?” Dan inquired.

“Comic books,” Eleanor said, buttering toast. “Television. Do you know what blotto means, Ralphie?”

“My name,” Ralphie announced, “is Ralph. R-a-l-p-h. There's no y on the end of it. And blotto means tight. Tight means drunk. Have I drunk enough milk?”

Eleanor was laughing and nodding. Ralphie was up, kissing his mother's hair swiftly; then he turned grave eyes on Dan, gave him a swift salute and turned on his heel.

"I'll ride my bike. I've got a whole half hour, almost." He disappeared onto the rear porch, and was gone. Dan heard the garage door sliding up.

Eleanor said, "Our son Ralph, spelled R-a-l-p-h, is too old to kiss a man—that's you—good-by or good night."

"Well," Dan said wryly, but feeling a pinch somewhere inside, "that seems to be that."

Eleanor's eyes were on Dan steadily now, studying him. What she saw was a man of average height with heavy shoulders; she looked into the familiar deep-blue eyes and was conscious of the mahogany-red hair above and the freckles climbing over and across the rather broad nose and the deep fine lines that added so much character to a very appealing face.

Reading his mind, she said, "Cindy'd like to ask him for Thanksgiving dinner, Dan. Should she?"

Dan stood up and shrugged. "Ellie, I don't want to start opposing this thing and get Cindy's back up. But—well, Thanksgiving's a sort of family day."

Eleanor lifted her face for his kiss, then Dan went out the rear door.

As she set a fresh place for Cindy, Eleanor decided against mentioning Chuck Wright this morning, especially in view of Dan's unspoken rejection of the Thanksgiving-dinner idea. Then she flipped on the radio for a news report.

After listening a few minutes—her attention not caught by the report of the three escaped convicts or by the warning that these men were armed and dangerous—she heard Cindy descending the back stairs. Eleanor turned off the radio. As soon as Cindy was out of the house, Eleanor's own day would really begin.

IN THE office of the Sheriff, in downtown Indianapolis, the day had started long before. Through the morning Jesse Webb had kept in close contact with the State Police, the city police, the teletypes, the news reports and the FBI. They had now an accurate description of the gray sedan, its license number and the approximate time of its theft from a farm south of Terre Haute.

Jesse hated waiting. There was a helplessness about it that worked like sandpaper on his nerves. The roadblocks had been set up on all the main highways; everything that could be done was being done. But Jesse was not satisfied.

His uncle, Frank Pritchard, telephoned him after the ten-o'clock radio news. Jesse listened to the tired voice, nodding his lean head occasionally. Then he said, "I haven't forgotten a thing, Uncle Frank. Go to sleep."

"Was that Frank P.?" Tom Winston, the deputy who shared the small office, had heard the conversation. "Bet he'd like to be back in the business today."

"Yeah," Jesse said slowly, "with two good hands and his gun."

"Why'd you tell him to go to sleep?"

Jesse Webb turned on him, biting off the words. "I told him to go back to sleep because he's got a job he has to keep. A night-watchman job at the meat-packing plant. I don't want him to lose *that* one because of Glenn Griffin."

Winston picked up a sheaf of papers and retreated. "I didn't know what had become of old Frank P.," he said apologetically.

Jesse stared after his friend as Winston slouched down the corridor. Don't blame Winston, Jesse reminded himself; blame the guy who did it. He could see it happening again.

Uncle Frank had been behind the parked car when Glenn Griffin came out of the little apartment hotel. Even in his blue uniform, Uncle Frank had looked too old and wispy for the .38 he held in his hand. Then he shouted. Glenn Griffin had whirled, firing, and two bullets had ripped into Uncle Frank's right arm, permanently injuring a nerve. Now the arm was a hanging, limp, useless thing.

Jesse had blamed himself for not letting go then, blasting; but he had been temporarily stunned and surprised to hear Uncle Frank scream like a child, a terrible shriek that still haunted Jesse. Glenn Griffin had leaped back inside the doorway, graceful as a dancer, despite the roar of the other guns. Then Glenn Griffin, while Uncle Frank lay writhing on the ground, had shouted for a chance to surrender, throwing his gun into the street.

Jesse recalled the blank wall of unreason that had come down on him as he stepped over the gun on the pavement and approached the unarmed young hoodlum; he had been helpless despite the shouts of his lieutenant, ordering him to stop. It was not until he had yanked the cowering Glenn Griffin to his toes with one hand and brought his other full into the prisoner's handsome but distorted face that Jesse Webb had felt a momentary relief from the grip of rage.

Thinking about it now, more than two years later, left him pale and shaken. He remembered the way Uncle Frank had been eased off the city force because of his withered arm. He recalled, too, the trial of Glenn Griffin, with the boy smiling blandly through the bandages that held his broken jaw in place while his attorney pointed dramatically to this "indisputable evidence of police brutality." Even after the jury had brought in the guilty verdict—it was Griffin's third major conviction—the young man had kept up his front. At the sentencing, his kid brother, captured with him that same night, had begun to tremble. But not Glenn.

The only time Glenn Griffin had shown any emotion was that day when the federal marshal was taking him away. Jesse had made a point of being present. The boy spoke carefully, stiffly.

"You got yours coming, copper," he said—not spitting out the words, nothing dramatic or violent about it.

Jesse Webb stood up now from his desk. He rubbed the back of his neck with the palm of his hand; it came away wet. Then he left the office and walked toward the Statehouse.

Lieutenant Van Dorn of the State Police grinned at Jesse's scowl from behind the counter. "The city can't pick up any trace of this Helen Lamar, Jess. They've ripped whole buildings apart. We can't get anything from the roads except the usual—the car's been spotted thirty-two times since seven o'clock. But not officially. My guess is the woman's out West somewhere and they're on their way to her, probably all the way across Illinois by now."

Then he turned his head and peered at Jesse from the corner of his eyes. "You look awful. Bad night?"

"No," Jesse answered slowly, thinking of Kathleen.

Then something struck him between the eyes. It was only a possibility, and a very slight one at that, but he was taking no chances. He picked up the telephone and dialed his office.

"Tom," he said when Winston answered, "send a car out to bring my wife to the office. Tell her I just want to see her. Don't scare the girl, hear?"

Anything was possible. You could never tell when it came to a mind like Griffin's.

ELEANOR HILLIARD was about to go up the front stairs to change into her gardening clothes when she heard the step on the porch. The front doorbell rang. She sighed. It was that blissful

moment after lunch when Ralphie had returned to school and she felt a certain treasured sense of freedom until 3:30. It annoyed her that anyone had come to the front door. The family and tradesmen normally used the side entrance.

The man who faced her on the porch, a very young man with short-cropped, glistening black hair, wore faded blue farmer's overalls and he was smiling almost apologetically. He looked boyish, and so miserable about his errand that Eleanor smiled, too.

"Sorry to bother you, ma'am," he said in a voice that was almost a whisper, "but I guess I've lost my way. I'm trying to get to the Bulliard Dairy. I know it's in the neighborhood, but—"

Then he stopped, and now he was looking over her shoulder into the hall, a subtle alteration taking place around the edges of his mouth. Involuntarily, she turned.

After that, everything happened so fast and with such precision that she was paralyzed, mind and body.

She heard the door behind her open, felt the knob hard against her ribs, then heard it close. The older man, who must have entered through the back door, turned from her and stomped up the stairs. A third man, much younger, who wore the same strange gray-green garb as the big fellow, appeared in the dining-room door, then walked swiftly through the downstairs section of the house, opening doors, closing them. Eleanor saw, without really comprehending, the black gun in the hand of the young man in overalls who remained with her in the hall. She thought of the small automatic upstairs, concealed in the spring under Dan's bed. She felt then a scream accumulating, powerful and uncontrollable, in her throat.

"Take it easy, lady," the young man advised. "You open your mouth, your kid'll come home from school and find your body."

She lifted her hand to her mouth and bit down hard on the back of it, choking off the scream in the back of her aching throat.

The youngest man returned, not looking at her, and said, "All clear down here, Glenn." Without another word, he turned and went through the dining room toward the kitchen.

Eleanor heard the back door open and close and then a motor grind over in the driveway. Then she heard a familiar sound: the garage door descending on the metal runners.

In the silence that followed, the middle-aged man came down

the stairs; he carried one of Dan's suits over one arm. His animal-like face wore an expression that might have denoted pleasure, but his yellowish-green eyes, lost between the slits in the bulbous pouches, seemed as opaque as marbles.

"Nobody home but the missus," the man reported.

Staring at Dan's tweed suit, Eleanor thought of her husband, big, calm, reserved, never roused to anger. Even in the swift flood of panic and disgust—as she saw the older man's eyes crawl hungrily over her—the thought of Dan calmed her.

"Get in there, Robish," Glenn Griffin said, "and keep an eye open out front."

Robish, pulling his eyes from her, went into the living room. The back door opened and closed again. All three of them were in the house, the car concealed in the Hilliard garage.

"Now," said the one named Glenn. "Now, lady. We got a phone call to make, you and me. I guess you know what'll happen, you let go with anything fishy while you're talking. Case not, though, listen. We don't want to hurt nobody, specially kids. But when the little guy who owns that bike out there gets home . . ."

"What do you want me to do?" Eleanor asked.

Glenn Griffin grinned again. "Smart little lady. Hope the whole family's smart as you. Now."

Leaning against the telephone table, Eleanor listened to the directions, then picked up the phone and dialed Long Distance. She gave the operator a number that she knew she should remember but could not. A number in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania . . .

"PITTSBURGH!" Jesse Webb uttered an oath and stood up from his desk after talking to Carson, the studious-looking young FBI man assigned to the case. "They've located Helen Lamar."

Tom Winston didn't turn from his desk. "They got her?"

"She checked out over an hour ago. They're still questioning the hotel people, but as far as they can dope it she didn't receive a phone call, at least not at the hotel. She'd be too smart for that, figuring we might be watching." He was striding up and down. "But maybe he didn't have to call. They could have it all timed. You know where that leaves us, Tom? Nowhere. That leaves us with a license number and the description of a car. A car they'll ditch soon enough, but they're taking their time on that, too. No

trail. They can't melt into the ground!" He sat down abruptly and cracked the top of the desk with his fist. "Where is that car?"

RALPHIE arrived home at 3:30. Eleanor detained him in the living room, speaking swiftly. She had a terrible headache, she said; she had to have absolute quiet all afternoon; he would have to go out and play until suppertime and he was not to come back until then. But Ralphie was hungry—as usual. Then he was to go to the drugstore, get a sandwich; she gave him the money. Pleased at the chance to buy a drugstore sandwich on his own, Ralphie went off on his bicycle.

"Nice work, lady," Glenn said, pocketing his gun.

She looked at him without expression, feeling nothing now but the hard stone in the pit of her stomach.

"I got a few more questions now, Mrs. Hilliard."

Then the process started all over again. The questions . . . This daughter, what time did she get home? Did she drive her own car? Was she ever late? Okay, just let her walk in.

"You won't have to do a thing but keep quiet, see."

At 5:18 Cindy came into the living room through the sun porch. Eleanor was sitting stiff and still on the sofa. Glenn was standing by the television set; the gun was in his hand. Robish was in the small den in the rear of the house, watching the driveway through the side windows. Eleanor knew that the young one, named Hank, was still in the kitchen, his eye on the back yard, listening to news on the radio.

Cindy burst in, her checked coat flying, her hair flowing behind her. When she caught sight of her mother, she stopped, her hazel-flecked blue eyes snapping around the room, remaining a split second on Glenn Griffin.

Glenn grinned. "Come right in, redhead."

Cindy whirled and started to run.

"Okay," Glenn Griffin said, "we still got your old lady."

Robish burst in from the den as Cindy's step faltered at the sun-porch door. She turned slowly, catching sight of Robish. Dismissing him instinctively, she faced Glenn Griffin.

"That's better, redhead," he said, grinning. As his eyes flicked over her, the grin faded.

Cindy did not in any way indicate that she was terrified. She glared. "What do you want?"

Without taking his gaze from the girl, Glenn said, "Robish, get back to the window. The old guy's due any minute."

"I need a gun," Robish said.

"Get back there," Griffin told him, not glancing at him.

"You think you can—"

"Now."

Robish turned and disappeared into the den.

"Sit down, redhead," Glenn said. "Sit down and let me explain the facts of life. With that hair, you might feel like getting real brave. You might even get away with it. But that's not saying what'll happen to the old lady . . . or the kid brother . . . or the father. We're waiting for him now, see, so take off your coat and sit down."

Without removing her coat as commanded but glancing at Eleanor with a hint of a reassuring smile that failed to come off, Cindy sat down. She even lighted a cigarette, steadily.

"How long have these animals been here, Mother?" she asked.

Glenn laughed, a short, explosive snort of sound.

"I've lost track of time," Eleanor said. "Some time after noon. There's another one in the kitchen."

"In other words," said Cindy, blowing smoke, "the house is crawling with them."

Eleanor was watching Glenn Griffin's face at that moment, and she felt a tightening of her own terror. The young man's face went icy white, colorless, and the flesh around his even white teeth drew back into a stiff grin. He stood there perhaps half a minute; then he turned and, in that graceful feline glide of his, walked toward the muffled chatter of the radio in the kitchen.

There he remained until the sound for which Eleanor's nerves had been tensed reached her.

"Griffin!" Robish barked from the den.

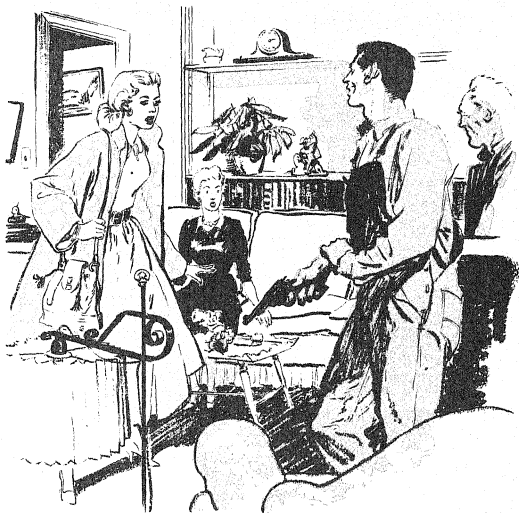
Glenn Griffin materialized again. "No lights now, not a word out of either of you. Got that?"

Eleanor nodded dumbly.

"Got that, redhead?"

Cindy seemed to look through Glenn Griffin as though he were simply not present. Eleanor longed to put out a hand. This was no time for Cindy's stubborn temper.

"He's trying to open the garage," Robish said. "You want me to grab him now?"



"Not with all those cars going by," Glenn said. "He'll come in." He lifted his voice. "You watching, Hank?"

"He's not coming in this way," the other's voice called from the kitchen.

Again Eleanor felt a scream gathering in her chest. She listened to the familiar footsteps: up the two steps, across the tiled sun porch. Glenn pointed the gun directly at the door.

First, Dan saw his wife, pale and haggard. He stopped short. The room was filled with the fading twilight. Then he saw Cindy, sitting straight, her face angry and defiant. Only then, because there was the faintest sort of shadow movement from the direction of the hall, did Dan see Glenn Griffin. And the pointed gun.

He felt his breath hold, and before anyone could move or speak, although he felt Eleanor straining half out of her chair, he had the whole picture clear. He recalled the news reports on the car radio; he realized he had been a fool for not comprehending as soon as he saw the gray sedan through the windows of the garage. But such a farfetched thought would not have occurred to him.

Eleanor saw the unnatural redness mounting in her husband's craggy face. Dan's mind, she knew, moved straight ahead, but with caution, into whatever faced him.

"I suggest you put the gun away, Griffin," Dan said. "If you fire it, you'll have the whole neighborhood down on you in less than three minutes."

Dan felt a movement from the direction of the den, but he did not shift his eyes from Glenn Griffin's.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

"I don't want anybody to get hurt," Glenn Griffin said. "What do *you* want, Pop?"

Dan crossed then, despite the gun, toward his wife. He placed a hand on her shoulder. "That's what I want, too."

Glenn let go with a laugh at that; he dropped the arm holding the gun. "Now you talk sense. So I'm going to talk sense, too."

The room was deep in shadow now, and Dan listened in silence. Glenn, striding in that slender catlike manner of his up and down the room, spoke in the manner of one who has known for months exactly what he wants to say. Dan listened while the helplessness of his position seeped into him like some benumbing drug.

All they wanted was a safe place to stay till about midnight; at the latest, two or three in the morning. They had some money coming, and when it arrived they would go. It was as simple as that. In the meantime, life in the Hilliard house was to go on normally. "Just like normal, see? You got it straight, folks?"

He spoke like an actor. He moved around the room and his brows lifted and his face worked as though some invisible camera were on him, as though he were trying to live up to some picture of himself that he carried in his mind. Dan recorded all this in his own mind and reached one stone-hard conclusion: these were not idle threats. This boy would kill one or all of them if anything went wrong. Dan could feel his body frozen and numb with helplessness.

"We'll do what you say, Griffin," Dan said. "Only —"

"Yeah?"

"Griffin, what if I could get you the money you want right away? *Before* midnight? Would you leave then?"

"You couldn't do it, Pop. I had a look at your bankbooks. You just don't have it."

"That sounds like a deal to me," Robish said from the den. "We could get the hell out of here."

Dan noted the urgency behind the invisible man's tone. "Maybe I could raise it. Somehow. What then, Griffin?"

"We're sticking," Glenn said.

"Yeah," Robish muttered sourly. "You'd risk our necks just to see that dame again."

Having unexpectedly created the breach, Dan stepped into it. "If this woman knows where to come, how do you know the police won't be following her?"

"What about that?" This time Robish emerged, planting himself at the far end of the room in threatened mutiny. "The guy talks sense, Griffin. Hell, you can pick up a woman anywheres."

A flicker of bewilderment passed over Glenn Griffin's face. He glanced from Dan to Robish. Then he whirled to Robish, the movement a dancer-shadow in the room. "I'm running the show, Robish. I thought we had that straight. We're staying, see, till Helen gets here. She's too smart to let the cops get on her tail. And I got to have the dough here, see. Right in this town."

"You got no right to take these chances just so you can get a copper knocked off. What do I care somebody broke your jaw? That was a long time ago, anyway, and—"

"No!" The word crackled. "You heard me, both of you."

Slowly Glenn stepped toward Dan. "You, Hilliard, you lay off. I don't need no ideas from you. I got my own all worked out fine."

"Ain't worth it," Robish snorted.

"I say it is, Robish. Where'd you be if it wasn't for me?" He spoke with his back to Robish, his eyes on Dan. "You'd be sitting down to that stew again with a guard breathing down your neck." He was rubbing his cheek, feeling the hard ridge of tissue that now protected the mended bone. "And you, Hilliard, you're going to keep your trap closed. You're going to play ball. Any cops show up in front of this joint, it's not going to be pretty."



MRS. KATHLEEN WEBB was smiling at her husband across what was left of a very thick steak. He was talking excitedly as he ate, and the ripple of excitement reached across the restaurant table.

"She left Pittsburgh at approximately four this afternoon. Driving south on U.S. 19. Less than an hour later, she was spotted on U.S. 40, heading west. West—that's here. I told you they were homing pigeons. She's sailing along now in her nice maroon two-door job, and they're holed up somewhere here thinking how smart they were to get her out of town so she could backtrack to them without being watched. Not so smart." He shoved the platter back. "Every town she goes through, there'll be a pair of eyes on her. But nobody'll bother her. Oh no. Along about Greenfield, they'll put a real tag on her and she'll breeze in here tonight and lead us right to the hole. Just like that."

"Jess," his wife said gently, with a faint wonder in her face, "you want to kill that man, don't you?"

Jesse knew the truth, the blank fact: yes. But suddenly it seemed important to explain and justify this feeling. "Look, all I know is that as long's a guy like Glenn Griffin is running around free and with a gun in his hand—well, it's not safe for the rest of us, any of us. It's like that, hear?" He leaned across the table. "That's why you're going to sleep in my office tonight. Or at a hotel. Which do you prefer?"

"I'll take the jail. I'd like to be near you."

Jesse smiled, taking her hand on the table. She cast an embarrassed glance around the restaurant, then turned to see a scowl replace the smile on her husband's narrow face. By an accidental association of images and fears, Jesse's mind had pounced upon a picture that was true in its general outline if not in detail. He was imagining Glenn Griffin with that gun pointed at frightened and innocent people. But where? If he only knew where . . .

As DAN HILLIARD stared at the gun held so casually in the hand of the young man, he was caught in a sickening helplessness. If the police came, it would be tragic; if they did not come, it might be worse.

"The kid's coming up on his bike," Robish reported.

Dan could hear the sound of a tire skidding on the gravel of the driveway. "With the lights off like this, the boy will be scared to death. You can't . . ."

Glenn Griffin took two swift, silent strides and jabbed the gun point with bruising force into Dan's ribs. Dan gasped for breath.

He heard quite distinctly the few short carefree steps on the back porch, the back door opening, the small cry of astonishment and sudden fear. He stiffened. As though his own insane and suicidal impulse had communicated itself through the gun against him, that point once again rammed itself with force into his ribs.

There was a brief and one-sided scuffle and then Ralphie was standing in the hall, held in the grip of a young man whom Dan had not seen before but whom he recognized as Glenn Griffin's brother.

"Let go!" Ralphie said, twisting out of the man's grasp.

"Hank." Glenn switched the gun idly so that it was directed at the hall. "Turn on the hall light, pull the blinds in the dining room and get back to the kitchen." As he spoke he stepped into the hall, out of view of the front windows.

Anyone on the street outside could see the Hilliards in their living room. They could not see the small straight figure of the boy in the hall, outrage written on his play-streaked face. Nor could they see Glenn Griffin beside the boy.

"What's that guy doing in our kitchen?" Ralphie demanded.

"It's all right, Ralphie," Dan said quickly. He then saw terror leap to the boy's face as the eyes fell on the gun in Glenn's hand. "I'll explain it to you, Ralphie."

With startling suddenness, the boy whirled, leaped to the front door, turned the knob and tugged.

"Take it easy now, kid," Glenn said in a single breath.

Still tugging, Ralphie began to cry. Then he gave up on the locked door. It appeared that he was going to turn to face them but what he did was so abrupt and ridiculous that even Griffin seemed startled into inaction. Ralphie darted into the living room, passed Dan and reached the unlocked sun-porch door.

"Ralphie!" Eleanor screamed in terror.

Dan was after the boy, but before he could reach him Robish, cursing, grabbed Ralphie. Glenn flipped off the lights almost as soon as Robish appeared in the living room. In semidarkness, the big man twisted Ralphie about, the enormous hands spinning him, then slipping down to his shoulders and shaking the small body. Dan heard Glenn draw the front-window curtains. All he saw was his son's head snapping up and down against his chest

MRS. KATHLEEN WEBB was smiling at her husband across what was left of a very thick steak. He was talking excitedly as he ate, and the ripple of excitement reached across the restaurant table.

"She left Pittsburgh at approximately four this afternoon. Driving south on U.S. 19. Less than an hour later, she was spotted on U.S. 40, heading west. West—that's here. I told you they were homing pigeons. She's sailing along now in her nice maroon two-door job, and they're holed up somewhere here thinking how smart they were to get her out of town so she could backtrack to them without being watched. Not so smart." He shoved the platter back. "Every town she goes through, there'll be a pair of eyes on her. But nobody'll bother her. Oh no. Along about Greenfield, they'll put a real tag on her and she'll breeze in here tonight and lead us right to the hole. Just like that."

"Jess," his wife said gently, with a faint wonder in her face, "you want to kill that man, don't you?"

Jesse knew the truth, the blank fact: yes. But suddenly it seemed important to explain and justify this feeling. "Look, all I know is that as long's a guy like Glenn Griffin is running around free and with a gun in his hand—well, it's not safe for the rest of us, any of us. It's like that, hear?" He leaned across the table. "That's why you're going to sleep in my office tonight. Or at a hotel. Which do you prefer?"

"I'll take the jail. I'd like to be near you."

Jesse smiled, taking her hand on the table. She cast an embarrassed glance around the restaurant, then turned to see a scowl replace the smile on her husband's narrow face. By an accidental association of images and fears, Jesse's mind had pounced upon a picture that was true in its general outline if not in detail. He was imagining Glenn Griffin with that gun pointed at frightened and innocent people. But where? If he only knew where . . .

As DAN HILLIARD stared at the gun held so casually in the hand of the young man, he was caught in a sickening helplessness. If the police came, it would be tragic; if they did not come, it might be worse.

"The kid's coming up on his bike," Robish reported.

Dan could hear the sound of a tire skidding on the gravel of the driveway. "With the lights off like this, the boy will be scared to death. You can't . . ."

Glenn Griffin took two swift, silent strides and jabbed the gun point with bruising force into Dan's ribs. Dan gasped for breath.

He heard quite distinctly the few short carefree steps on the back porch, the back door opening, the small cry of astonishment and sudden fear. He stiffened. As though his own insane and suicidal impulse had communicated itself through the gun against him, that point once again rammed itself with force into his ribs.

There was a brief and one-sided scuffle and then Ralphie was standing in the hall, held in the grip of a young man whom Dan had not seen before but whom he recognized as Glenn Griffin's brother.

"Let go!" Ralphie said, twisting out of the man's grasp.

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and the heavy shoulders of the man half turned away from him.

It was enough. Dan forgot the gun and Glenn Griffin completely. In that blank moment of wildness he took two more steps, felt the lights come up in the room, saw Ralphie's tear-filled, incredulous eyes and the hate-twisted face of the man looming over him. Dan whirled Robish's hulking body about as though it were a toy one third its size. The eyes in the bulbous pouches glittered with surprise. Then they closed completely as Dan's fist exploded in the square face.

Before, all had been silence; now the bone-against-bone sound of that single blow filled the whole house. The body straightened slightly, then collapsed into a soft heap.

What broke the silence again was Eleanor's cry as she saw Glenn Griffin move in behind Dan, lift the gun and bring it down full force against the top of his shoulder. The whole right side of Dan's body went numb and cold, and he felt himself staggering sideways. He felt, too, a rough hand shoving him backward into the enveloping softness of the sofa. The blackness closed in.

When he could see again, and hear, he saw Glenn Griffin facing the man Robish, the gun directed at Robish's stomach.

"... not going to be like this, see!" Griffin was almost shouting.

Robish was muttering incomprehensible words and his greenish-yellow eyes were fixed on Dan.

"Get to the kitchen, Robish, fast!"

"You think I'm gonna let him get away with that?"

"*Nothing's going to foul this up!*" Glenn cried. "Got that, Robish? *Nothing!*"

After that, the blackness threatened to return. Dan's next impression was of Glenn Griffin reaching into his pocket and drawing out something small which Dan could not see. The young man crossed to Eleanor and Dan felt himself stiffen. In that instant he knew that under similar circumstances he would be unable to do anything but what he had just done when Robish grabbed Ralphie. That or worse.

"Read it," Glenn said. "Loud enough so he can hear it."

Dan heard his wife's tight voice begin to read the yellow newspaper clipping, and he had to concentrate to catch the words.

What she read was a dispassionate news-service story of an occurrence in New York State. A convict, attempting to escape from a house in which he was hiding, had climbed into a pickup

truck, holding a small girl in front of him. Even though wounded himself by police fire, he had shot the child through the stomach and she had died.

When Eleanor had finished reading, there was silence. Eleanor held Ralphie's hand. Cindy's face was ashen. Dan could picture Glenn Griffin carefully clipping this from a newspaper months ago—looking ahead to just this moment of his life.

Dan realized now that he was consumed by hatred of this young criminal who stood carelessly, letting the significance of that newspaper account sink in. A sharp warning twisted in Dan: he must not let himself become the victim of his emotions again.

"Now, Hilliard," Glenn said, "you got a gun in the house?"

Without hesitation, Dan nodded. He had no choice. He couldn't afford to fight: too much was at stake. "Upstairs. In the coils of bedspring. My bed."

Glenn shouted for Hank, who came into the room at once; Glenn spoke quietly to his brother and Hank disappeared up the stairs.

When he returned, Glenn said in a whisper, "Put it in your pocket, Hank. Don't tell Robish." He turned to Dan. "You agree with that, Hilliard?"

Dan nodded. He had reached the conclusion that, in addition to playing *their* game, he must also concentrate on Glenn: he was the leader, the one to watch and to fear and to depend on.

"One thing, Griffin," Dan said when Hank had gone again. "I'll handle my family. We'll all do anything you say. Anything within reason. But if one of you touches one of us again—"

"I don't go for threats, Pop."

"Griffin," Dan said, his breath paining him, "this is no threat. I'm stating facts. If one of you touches one of us again, you're done for. So are we, but that's just the way it'll have to be. I'm not just talking tough. I'm saying we'll help you if you can control your men."

This was the sort of challenge which Glenn Griffin was capable of comprehending.

"I handled Robish, didn't I?"

"And very well," Dan said. "I think we understand each other, Griffin." He glanced at Eleanor. "I think we all know what we have to do, don't you, Eleanor?"

Eleanor could only nod her head.

CHAPTER 2

HE CURTAINS had been drawn open, but the headlights passing on the boulevard seemed unreal. Dan Hilliard, by lifting his eyes from the photographs on the front page of the evening paper, could look across the hall into the dining room and see two of the faces reproduced there: the Griffin brothers bent over road maps at the table. Although he was not able to see it, the third face was in the den beyond the open door at the end of the living room.

Cindy, on the sofa with Ralphie, who pretended to be reading a book, turned her back purposefully and contemptuously on that door. Eleanor was seated in her usual chair, so, if any passerby should glance in, he would see a perfectly normal family group.

It was all very carefully arranged. From the front windows in the dining room, Glenn commanded a view of the street and the lawn. From the den, Robish could keep watch on the back yard, the garage and the driveway along the side of the house.

Dan was stiff; his rib was bruised and aching, and with each breath there was a stab of pain in his lungs. The two and a half hours that had passed had filled him with a slow, banked-down fury. It was directed not only at the three men themselves but at something larger and less tangible: an incredible accident that had caused these men to choose *his* house. Because they had seen Ralphie's bicycle in the driveway? Because the closest neighbors were two city lots away? Yes, but why *this* house? There must be others as ideally situated for their purposes.

Dan glanced at his watch. 8:34. Three hours and twenty-six minutes until midnight. He had made it so far; he would get through the rest.

The evening had been more or less without incident. It had been shortly after dinner that Robish had demanded to know where Dan kept the liquor. There was none in the house. Robish had muttered that Dan was lying; he had crashed about in a fruitless search, snarling threats of what would happen if he found any. Robish was emotional, twisted, ugly and unpredictable. Dealing with him was like trying to talk to an animal.

The telephone shrilled. In the shock of silence that followed,

the house came alive. Dan rose. Glenn Griffin came into the hall, gun in hand, and Hank went up the stairs to listen on the bedroom phone.

"Okay, redhead, answer it, and be careful. If someone asks for a Mr. James, that's me. If it's for anyone in the family, let 'em talk. Quick now."

Cindy picked up the phone. "Hello . . . oh . . . yes, Chuck. I'm . . . well, I'm not feeling very well. . . . Oh, a cold, I guess. . . . No, I can't." She listened a long moment. "No, Chuck, but please understand. You do, don't you? . . . Tomorrow, then. G'night." She replaced the telephone and faced Glenn Griffin. "Do I pass, teacher?" she inquired, her tone acid and scornful.

Glenn looked up the stairs as Hank descended, nodding.

"You pass, sis," Glenn said. "Maybe you got more sense than I figured. Who was that, the boy friend?"

"It was Anthony Eden," Cindy said and returned to the sofa.

Dan said, "Ralphie. Bedtime, pal."

Without protest, Ralphie said good night and went into the hall to mount the stairs. Dan followed, according to ritual. Glenn didn't object, watched them both unsmiling. Dan happened to glance at Hank Griffin then, caught a strange expression lurking in those dark eyes. The expression, as Dan saw it, was one of longing, or envy, or both.

In the bedroom, with the model airplanes dangling from the ceiling, Ralphie undressed, donned his pajamas, went into the bathroom, brushed his teeth quickly—while Dan sat on the side of the bed, in silence. How could a man explain a thing like this to a ten-year-old boy?

In bed, Ralphie spoke. "They don't look so tough."

"They're . . . tough, Ralphie. Don't you fool yourself."

"You're scared." It was not a question but an accusation.

"Yes, son," Dan said softly, "I'm scared. You should be, too."

"Mother's scared, too. But Cindy isn't. And I'm not."

There was nothing else to do then but to speak the truth, fully. So Dan leaned forward on the bed and whispered steadily and firmly for a few moments. When he finished, he met disillusion.

"I could sneak down the back stairs," Ralphie said. "That guy Robish is in the den, but he wouldn't even hear me open the back door. Nobody's in the kitchen now."

"Listen, Ralph," Dan growled. "You want to be considered

a grown boy in this house, don't you? Then you've got to act like one and *think* like one. If you went running out of here and got the police, do you know what would happen? They'd shoot your mother and your sister."

The boy's face clouded; suddenly there were tears in his eyes. "I don't want them to take me along," he blurted.

"Take you . . . ?"

"You heard what Mother read. That newspaper thing about the little girl. What's going to happen when they go, Dad?"

"They're not going to take you," Dan said slowly. The fear in his son's eyes lashed knifelike at his rational control. Perhaps he had known all along and had been afraid to face it. Well, he was facing it now. "They're not taking you, or anyone, Ralphie. I'll see to that."

"But—what can you do? Now you don't even have a gun."

"You heard me!" Dan reached for control of his voice. "I said not to worry. Go to sleep. You ought to know I wouldn't let them take you along, Ralphie."

Dan reached out and took hold of Ralphie's shoulder and held it a brief moment; then he went into the hall, turning off the light, closing the door.

Dan descended the front stairs slowly, the fierce new hatred choking him. In the living room again, he looked at Eleanor, sitting quiet, her face wan. He saw Cindy, whose head was resting on her arm along the back of the sofa.

You can't let rage force you into action, he warned himself.

He sat down again. Three minutes to nine. He stared incredulously at his watch, then lifted it to his ear. It was still running.

IN THE Sheriff's office, Jesse Webb had been waiting for the telephone to ring. Even so, the sound echoing in the night stillness startled him. He spoke his name into the phone, listened. In less than one minute, he said, "Check," and replaced the phone.

From now on, even waiting was a waste of time. Helen Lamar had disappeared. Jesse Webb smashed his right fist into his left palm.

Driving the maroon two-door sedan, she had been sighted east of Columbus, Ohio, approaching the city. It was quite a proposition to follow her progress through a large city but, as it turned out, all the precautions had been unnecessary and useless.

Helen Lamar had made one simple mistake. She had exceeded the speed limit and a traffic-patrol car had attempted to stop her. She must have grown panicky then and stepped on the gas. The patrol car gave chase.

And yet, Jesse thought angrily, they had their instructions, all of them: DO NOT ARREST REPEAT DO NOT ARREST. The order was on every teletype between Pittsburgh and Indianapolis.

"Speeding, for heaven's sake!" Jesse said bitterly.

She gave the pursuit car the slip. She was taking no chances because she was hauling money, and she couldn't let herself be stopped. How could she know that the fools only wanted to give her a traffic-violation ticket?

The police had found the car, but not soon enough. Helen Lamar was gone. She had slipped somehow, in the snakelike way of the criminal, down a hole, into hiding, protected somewhere by others of her kind. Right now she was probably trying to think of a safe way to contact Griffin.

What would Griffin do then? No money now, no means of escape in the clever manner he'd planned, all his neatly laid calculations gone haywire—what would he do?

GLENN GRIFFIN remained in the Hilliard house, but Dan was now out of it. It was 9:15.

He sat in the family car while a service-station attendant filled the gas tank and checked the oil and water. He was following orders now. The car was needed for a getaway. Robish had called Glenn a fool for letting Dan leave the house, but Glenn was confident that Dan would do what he had to do, simply because his wife, his daughter and his son remained in the house.

Glenn was right, as usual. Dan was staring at a telephone inside the service station. He could speak to the police now in less than thirty seconds. Would they realize that it would be irresponsible murder of innocent people for them to attempt to move in at once? Could he make them understand this fact?

Perhaps. But, even if they did, what precautions would they take? They would have to set up roadblocks in the neighborhood in the hope of stopping Griffin. Their job was to capture the two Griffin boys and Robish. His was to protect his family. And certainly Glenn Griffin had not overlooked any danger inherent in letting Dan leave the house. He had certainly looked ahead.

He knew that he needed the Hilliard car. But Glenn must have realized that, as soon as he had gone, leaving the Hilliards behind, that blue car would become as well known as the gray one—once Dan had notified the police. How did Griffin hope to prevent this?

Dan tore his gaze from the telephone. Glenn hoped to prevent it in the same way that he was now making sure that Dan did not telephone the police: by keeping one of the family in the escape car. *I don't want them to take me along*, Ralphie had said.

If Dan brought the police into it, he was running a risk; if he did not, he was no better off and perhaps even more at the mercy of Glenn Griffin's design. Now, instead of looking forward to the time when the money and the woman would arrive, he dreaded it. Less than three hours. Perhaps, in the interim . . .

Perhaps what?

In the interim, he told himself grimly, you will do as you have been told and you will hope that, by the time the moment of departure arrives, you will have thought of some threat to hang over Glenn Griffin's head that will make him change his plans.

Dan paid the attendant. The car purred easily. A fine car, efficient, fast. Dan had to concentrate very hard in order to avoid imagining the holes that bullets would make in the rear window and the stain that blood would leave on the upholstery. If only it was the blood of the three men.

Dan brought the car to a halt near a liquor store. He bought a fifth of bourbon. Then he was in the car again and turning it in the direction of his house. Soon he caught sight of the yellow flare from the front windows. He parked the car as he had been instructed to park it: nose pointed toward the boulevard. He climbed out, feeling eyes upon him, crawling over him like insects. He went into the house through the side door, crossed the sun porch and then the living room toward Glenn Griffin waiting in the hall, out of sight of the front windows. Robish clumped in from the dining room and snatched the bottle.

"Didn't get any ideas, did you, Pop?" Glenn proceeded to search Dan.

Dan's eyes returned to the living room. At once a question surged up, hot and choking: "Where's Cindy?"

"She's out with Charles Wright," Eleanor said. "He came anyway. Cindy went out before he could get inside."

"I talked to her, Hilliard," Glenn Griffin explained easily. "She

won't make any mistakes. I told her what would happen if she did. Robish, now, he thinks I'm a fool. What about you, Hilliard? You don't think I'm a fool, do you?"

"Not a fool," Dan said slowly. "No."

Glenn laughed. "Pop, you're all right. You're a real funny guy. Now you sit down while I have a little drink with Robish."

Dan felt himself moving into the living room.

"Cindy won't take any chances, Dan," Eleanor said, trying to smile. "You're not worried about that, are you?"

"Of course not," Dan lied, recalling the defiant contempt in his daughter's eyes. "Cindy's too smart."

"Dan . . ." Eleanor whispered. "Dan, you didn't . . . ?"

Dan shook his head. Eleanor relaxed slightly. "Because it's such a short time now, dear, till they go."

Dan stared at her. What if Cindy made some foolish attempt to get help? Certainly she would go over all the possibilities with which he had struggled. But what would Cindy conclude? You could never be sure that someone else might not examine the same set of facts and arrive at the opposite conclusions.

THERE WAS a cold glint in Cindy's eyes—very puzzling to Charles Wright. Sitting beside her in his sports car in a drive-in restaurant—where he had brought her finally, after suggesting almost every place else in the city—Chuck sipped his coffee and let the evening's silence gather around again.

Over and over she had assured him, finally with some impatience, that it was just this cold nagging her. But Chuck had never seen her behave like this before. Even at the office she managed a secret smile occasionally. And tonight, her eyes were clear, with no evidence of a cold in them.

Cynthia wasn't the sort of girl Chuck normally chose for a playmate. Since coming home from the Marines, he had steered clear of the ones who might want to turn a nice thing into a permanent, and therefore, in his book, a not-so-nice thing. Chuck had worked out for himself a very neat little philosophy: life is short, marriage is long, and love is something no one can depend on, ever. If this was the cynicism of youth, so be it. He was stuck with it.

But with Cindy, things had been different from the beginning. This fact bewildered him and continued to fill him with an odd high-running excitement, whether he was with her or not. What



did it mean? And why was he sticking around to find out, since he already suspected that she could not fit into his pattern?

Tonight now, she had lied to him on the telephone and she had been lying ever since she had leaped out the door of her house before he could so much as touch the doorbell. Now she had fallen into a silence that shut him out completely.

"Look, I don't mind being ignored," he said, twisting around in the small seat, "but you might give me a hint."

"I'm sorry, Chuck." Just that.

Chuck shrugged.

Slowly—very slowly then—Cindy turned to him. The small face trembled, fell apart, going all wrong. She was lowering her head, her lip shaking, and, before he could speak, she was against him, full against his chest. His heart tightening, Chuck held her. He could feel her shuddering. Though the questions surged in him, he said nothing. When she didn't speak, the suspicions of the last few weeks hardened into words: "Your people don't think I'm worth much, do they?"

Cindy, her mind battering like a trapped wild bird against her stiff helplessness, decided that she had to tell him. Chuck would know what to do. "Chuck, I have to tell you. Chuck —"

But then, with the words already forming in her throat, she remembered Glenn Griffin whispering hastily into her ear as he half shoved her toward the door an hour ago: *You tell anyone, we'll take your mother along on our little ride after a while, redhead.*

Maybe the kid, too, in case the cops get wise to when we're blowing out of here tonight. Any shooting, you folks get it first, see.

"Yes, Cindy?" Chuck prompted.

"Take me home."

"What?"

"Please, Chuck, no more questions. Take me home."

"Not now. What were you going to say?"

"Please!" She was sitting up straight again, in her own corner.

He took her home. What the devil, he was thinking, with the irritation erupting through him. Mr. Hilliard looked upon him as reckless, irresponsible. Probably Papa Hilliard had had his say: Chuck Wright isn't going to marry you, Cindy, you or anyone else. And she had believed him. This was the brush-off.

Mr. Hilliard was right, wasn't he? You don't intend to marry her, do you? That much was for sure. Then why the resentment?

He turned into the Hilliard driveway, and noted a small but, to him, interesting fact: Mr. Hilliard had failed, for the first time within Chuck's memory, to put his car in the garage for the night. Tsk-tsk, he thought satirically, what will happen to our world if we start breaking with our little ironclad habits?

Chuck jumped out, came around to open Cindy's door. She looked unable or unwilling to move. He felt a strange melting sensation in the pit of his stomach. His youthful anger gone, he touched her arm. For a split second he was sure that she was going to crumple against him again.

"Chuck," she whispered suddenly, "do you have a gun?"

The question seemed to come from nowhere, staggering him, taking his breath. "Cindy, what do you mean? *Cindy!*"

But she was already running toward the house. He followed her to the rear door, the one she always used at night. She turned there, while her hand fumbled at the lock. "Forget it, Chuck. Can you forget everything?"

"No," he said and took the key from her trembling hand and unlocked the door. "Cindy, you can't go in now, like this. Let me come in with you. We've got to —"

"No!" The whisper threatened to grow loud. "Just stay away and leave me alone, that's all!"

She slipped into the house, closed the door. Chuck strode to the car. He discovered that he still held the key to the back door of the Hilliard house in his palm. He shoved it into his pocket,

stepped into the car, maneuvered it onto the boulevard. What would a girl like Cindy Hilliard want with a gun? He'd get the answer to that one tomorrow morning, first thing.

DAN HEARD the back door open and close. He had come up to bed at eleven, following orders. Since then, he had lain there with his hand stretched between the twin beds, holding Eleanor's.

There was a low, indistinct rush of voices in the kitchen. Dan got up and went into the upstairs hall. "Cindy?" he called.

Behind him Eleanor inquired with taut concern, "Dan?"

"Stay there, dear," Dan warned, then called again: "Cindy?"

The dining-room light clicked on and a flow of light reached the downstairs hall. Dan was going down the stairs when he heard Robish's voice, blurred with whiskey: "What's it to you, Hank?"

Dan paused in the front hall and looked into the dining room. He heard Glenn Griffin approach from behind him, and he knew the gun was on him. But what he saw before him made him forget that. Cindy was backed against the buffet. Robish was in front of her, his head twisted, his small eyes on Hank Griffin, who sat at the table. The room reeked with whiskey. Dan took in everything in a sickening and terrifying flash.

"What's the matter?" Robish demanded again of Hank. "Got to search her, don't I? Searched the old man, didn't we?"

Dan could see Hank's profile as the boy stood up at the table; his dark eyes were sharp. "Get upstairs to bed, miss," Hank Griffin said, each word clipped off and distinct.

"Oh no, oh no," Robish said hazily, "gonna search her, might have a gun, got to search the pretty little redhead."

Hank's words were still soft: "Let her by, Robish."

Robish turned fully. "You giving orders, too, Hank?"

"This time."

Ignoring Hank, Robish turned again to Cindy. But Hank reached him in two steps, whirled him about, and then Dan saw Robish's head snap back; he saw the sudden blood.

Hank stepped away then. "You going up to bed now, miss?"

Cindy joined Dan in the hall as Robish shook his head.

Then there was a low roar from that broad, working throat. One arm went out to Hank, but Hank stepped easily aside.

Out of nowhere the automatic appeared in Hank's hand.

"Hank, you damn fool," Glenn Griffin breathed harshly.

Robish was blinking at the gun in Hank's hand, Dan's automatic, the one Robish didn't know existed. He didn't move. He stared owlishly at the two brothers.

"Turning on *me*, huh," Robish muttered at last. "Turning on your old pal." The words seeped from between thick, moist lips. He was staring at Hank. "You better stay away from me."

Still muttering, he disappeared into the living room. Glenn glared at his brother. "Get to bed," he said, his tone hard.

"Thank you, Mr. Griffin," Cindy said then, her eyes on Hank.

She held Dan's arm. They turned to the stairs. Eleanor was halfway down. It was at that moment that they heard a door closing. It took several seconds for the significance of that sound to reach them. Glenn understood first. "Stay down here," he barked to Dan. Then to Hank: "Cover 'em."

Glenn ran across the dark living room, through the sun porch, cursing as his leg struck furniture twice, delaying him.

Robish was outside. Glenn was outside. Dan, frowning, realized that for the first time he was in the house and two of them were not. The pressure of her hand on his arm told him that the same thought had taken hold of Cindy. He could depend on Cindy's acting fast now; he could depend on Eleanor's getting upstairs to the telephone. In the dark, and inside, he had as good a chance as Glenn, who was outside and unprotected.

His first and immediate problem was to get hold of Hank's gun. In less than half a minute, he made the decision. In the house, all doors locked and the family safely huddled upstairs in one room out of range of Glenn's gun, Dan had a chance to hold off Glenn and Robish, perhaps to force them to get in the car and leave. A slight chance, perhaps, but he had no other.

It came to him then how he would get hold of Hank's gun. "Faint," he whispered to Cindy.

Cindy, not waiting even a second, collapsed on the floor.

CHAPTER 3

DAN HILLIARD uttered a small breath of surprise as Cindy fell and, stooping over her, he watched Hank Griffin out of the corner of his eye. The boy looked bewildered, uncertain. "Give me a hand, Griffin," Dan said, attempting to lift his daughter.

The boy hesitated, straining to hear whatever sounds Glenn and Robish might be making outside the house.

"Come on," Dan said. "Can't you see this child is sick?"

Hank made up his mind then. With the gun in one hand, he came forward, placed his other arm under Cindy's shoulders.

The gun was directed toward the front door. It was the second Dan had anticipated. He struck out, fast and smoothly. The automatic clattered to the floor. Dan made a dive for it.

The metal felt moist and warm in his hand. Behind him he heard a small cry of astonishment and pain and turned to see Cindy sitting up now, her mouth clamped over the boy's wrist, biting hard. Hank's face writhed in pain.

"Get out," Dan said curtly. "Cindy, lock the other doors and get upstairs. Ellie! Ellie, get on the phone up there, fast, and keep Ralphie with you, away from the windows."

Cindy was already up, flipping off the dining-room light. Dan heard the click of the side-door lock and watched Hank stepping toward the front door. "Hurry it up," Dan said to young Griffin.

Hank opened the front door. Dan shoved him out and locked the front door. He was turning toward the stairs when he heard, from above, Eleanor's scream. He bounded up the stairs as Eleanor appeared from Ralphie's room.

"Ralphie . . . Dan . . . Ralphie's gone!"

Cindy came up the stairs behind him, flipped off the hall light, plunging them into total darkness. They seemed frozen there then, the three of them—mute figures, caught, trapped.

"Maybe he got away," Cindy said at last. "Maybe he—"

But Glenn's voice reached them then from outside. "We ain't going, Hilliard. Open up the back door and throw that gun out." Dan automatically dropped down. Cindy crouched low.

"Hilliard," Glenn cried outside, and there was a note of cruel desperation behind the call. "Hilliard, listen!"

At first, Dan couldn't believe the voice that reached him. But Eleanor recognized it and uttered a faint cry of defeat.

"Dad?" The one word came from outside. There was no childish valor in it; the word was high with terror. "Dad."

"If we go, Hilliard," Glenn Griffin's voice said, "we're taking the kid. Open up and we'll forget the whole business."

Dan flicked the safety latch on the gun and stood up. "I'm coming down to the back door," he called to Glenn Griffin.

It was not a shout that reached him then from the darkness, but a laugh, a thin and arrogant gust of triumph.

"Lock the bedroom door, Ellie. If you hear a shot downstairs, make the call anyway. If you don't, keep Cindy up here. No matter what else you hear, don't call."

Dan descended the uncarpeted back stairs and walked through the tiny pantry; then he threw open the door.

"Toss the gun first, Hilliard," Glenn Griffin advised.

Dan tossed the gun. Again he had no choice.

Glenn appeared first out of the darkness. Then Ralphie. Dan heard the stifled sob as the boy leaned against him.

"Go upstairs, son," Dan said.

The boy obeyed, running on bare feet up the stairs. A door opened and Dan heard Ralphie taken in with the others.

Now Glenn was standing before him, tall and angular. Behind Glenn, Hank Griffin appeared from the darkness.

"We got Robish, too," Glenn Griffin said, pushing Dan backward into the pantry. "I had to put him on ice for a while so he'd learn who was boss around here." The young man spoke coolly.

Then the blow struck. It was a vicious swipe, the barrel of the revolver catching him on the forehead. Dan went down.

He had no idea how much later it was that he awakened in his own bedroom in the darkness. He stirred with a groan. Then he felt Eleanor's hand on his face, over his mouth, gentle and cool.

"Dan," she whispered, "Dan, don't talk, don't move, darling. Dan, you hear me?" His head nodded under her hand. "Dan, I gave you some pills to make you sleep. It's almost morning. If you can hear me, listen to me."

"Ralphie?"

"He's all right, Dan. Sleeping."

"And . . . them?"

"They're still here. Cindy's with Ralphie and one of them's in her bedroom up here. The other two are downstairs. Dan, you did a foolish and terrible and wonderful thing, and I love you. Can you hear me, darling? You must never do anything like that again. You might have been killed. Dan, I'm pleading with you. Promise me, darling. Never again."

"I promise," he whispered, dully.

"We don't want you to be brave, darling," his wife said. "We want you well and alive with us."

There were things that Dan knew vaguely at this moment, but he couldn't arrange them in his mind and he couldn't explain them. "Didn't the woman come?"

"Telephoned," Eleanor said softly. "After midnight. She's not coming, Dan. I don't know what it means, but they're staying. Now try to sleep again, dear."

He felt then her lips closing over his, soft and full, and he felt his love for her stirring deeply, more deeply perhaps than ever before. He slept.

NEXT MORNING Glenn Griffin sat at the head of the table, one of Dan's hats pushed back from his face. A cigarette dangled between his lips. Dan studied his own large freckled hands. Beside him, Eleanor pressed her leg against his. Cindy was across from Dan, her eyes black and determined. Beside her, Ralphie was alert, his gaze soft and bewildered as he stared at the gash on his father's forehead.

"Things've changed, folks," Glenn was saying. "My friend who was coming can't make it. Some coppers tried to pick her off." Outside, the rain gurgled in the drains. "Now I got things to do before I can go. We're going to stick a little longer."

"How much longer?" Dan asked.

"Until I get a certain envelope in the mail, Hilliard; that's how much longer."

"When will that be?"

"It might get here today. Meanwhile, everything goes on around here just like normal. You and the redhead go to work, just like usual. Only junior here's too smart a boy. He stays home. He's sick today."

"I'm sorry, Griffin," Dan said then, slowly. "I'm not going to work today. I'm sick, too."

Glenn's laugh died. "You could be a lot sicker, Hilliard."

"I can call my office. No one will think anything of it."

"Then how'm I going to get the envelope, Pop? With the dough in it." He was grinning faintly. "That envelope's addressed to you at your office, sec."

Dan considered this, feeling the pressure increase along Eleanor's leg. Then he shook his head. "I can't leave my wife in the house with that drunken friend of yours, Griffin. Not after what happened last night."

A poisonous silence hung over the room.

Then Glenn said, "Mrs. Hilliard can stay upstairs all day. I'll keep Robish down here."

"I can't take that chance. After last night."

"*Dammit*, Hilliard, I said I'm making a promise! Don't push, Hilliard. Don't push too far!" Glenn's chest was heaving. "I took orders all my life from smart-eyed characters like you. Now. You're going to that office of yours, Hilliard, and, as soon as that dough comes, you take it to your bank and get it changed into small bills, nothing over twenty, and then you call me and tell me you're on your way home. Just that, Hilliard. Only listen: I been in touch with a pal of mine, see. And this guy's going to do a little job for me. Before you come home, I'll think of some way for you to pay him off for me. You think you want to try something different, the kid and the wife'll be here." He stopped and began to grin. "Pop, you're a tough guy, but you be careful, see."

Eleanor reached for Dan's hand. She said quietly, "Dan, if one of them starts up the stairs all day, I'll scream so loud they'll have to use their guns, and that'll be the end of it. Do you understand me, dear? It's only a little time now." She stood up. "I'll get your raincoat. Isn't it an awful day?"

Dan happened to be watching Hank Griffin's face when Eleanor went into the hall: the boy stared after her with a strange expression of admiration.

In the hall, Dan climbed into the coat she held, then turned around and took his wife into his arms. He drew her to him and kissed her, unmindful of the eyes. Glenn's mocking laugh reached from the dining room, raucous and coarse. It was then that Hank Griffin spoke. "What's so funny?" the boy demanded of his brother.

The laughter broke off jaggedly.

"I don't see anything so funny you should break your neck laughing, that's all," Hank said, but his voice was shaky now.

"I laugh when I feel like it, Hank," Glenn said evenly. "You got nothing to say about it. Now go wake up Robish. I need some shut-eye. And you, Hilliard—what are you waiting for? Wouldn't it want to be late and get docked at that store, would you?"

Dan was looking past Glenn; then he took a step toward his son. "Ralphie, you heard what Mr. Griffin said. You stay with your mother upstairs and out of trouble." Ralphie nodded.

Abruptly, Dan raised a hand in brief salute and went out into the bone-chilling rain toward Cindy's car. Cindy joined him at once, sliding under the wheel, shooting the coupe down the driveway. Dan didn't look back.

Robish would wake up now, drunk, groggy. Would he turn on Glenn? Could Glenn handle him?

THE MAIL arrived in three large canvas bags at 9:31. The mail clerks worked fast, because Mr. Hilliard was standing in the mail room. He remained there until it had all been sorted. The senior clerk handed Dan all the envelopes addressed to Personnel Department or to Mr. Daniel Hilliard. The recognition of the return addresses on every envelope caused Dan to turn away abruptly, his whole body packed solid with defeat.

The next mail was five hours away, and no power on earth could hurry it. He went into his office, sat down behind the familiar desk and, working on some impulse that he dared not question, he reached for a blank piece of paper and his pen.

To Whom It May Concern, I wrote. Innocent people will be in the automobile with the three escaped convicts you want. If you shoot, you will be responsible for taking the lives of people who have done no harm. To attempt to trace this letter will endanger these same people.

He studied what he had written. Then he folded the paper, drew a plain envelope from his desk, sealed it over the note and addressed it: *Police Headquarters, South Alabama Street, City.*

He picked up the phone and dialed his home number.

"Ellie? Where are they?"

"Downstairs. I'm with Ralphie. Are you all right, dear?"

"Anything happen? Anything at all?"

"No. Only Mr. Patterson, the trash collector, came to the back door. He wanted to get in the garage, but I told him we'd lost the key and not to bother. He seemed awfully disappointed in a funny way, but that's all."

"He didn't notice anything odd?"

"No, I'm sure not. But Mr. R. thought he did. I was worried for a few minutes. That's all, Dan."

Dan heard a familiar, taunting laugh: Glenn Griffin, listening on the downstairs phone.

"Nothing in the morning mail," Dan said. "Perhaps this afternoon. Two forty-five. Good-by, dear."

Dan replaced the instrument on his desk. He sat bent forward, every nerve crying out for him to go home, to murder those men, to get it over with. But all he could do was sit, trying to devise a way to have that anonymous note delivered to the police without answering any questions about it.

"I SAW HIM snooping around those damn windows," Robish said. "We got to grab him, Griffin. Listen! He was up on his toes, looking in the garage."

"Mr. Patterson?" Eleanor said. "He just came to collect. He picks up the trash every Thursday morning and then he comes back after lunch for his check."

"I know what I seen," Robish said, his voice murky. "He saw the car. I'm going to get him. Let me have your gun."

"Hank," Glenn shouted, "where'd the old guy go?"

"House next door. I can see the back end of the truck."

"Then maybe I can catch him, Glenn," growled Robish.

"Glenn," Hank called, "why take chances? Let's just blow."

Eleanor's eyes were fixed on Glenn. "Mr. Patterson wouldn't be suspicious. He . . . you saw him . . . a man like that . . ."

"Shut up," Glenn Griffin said and extended his gun toward Robish. "Mrs. Hilliard, you want the old guy to bring the cops up on your lawn? Use your head."

Robish shoved the gun into the side of Dan's gray jacket. He took a step toward the back door. Glenn's voice halted him.

"If you get into trouble, don't come back here, Robish."

"Me? I don't know what trouble is."

Just before she collapsed over the table, Eleanor thought that she had never heard Robish's voice so lighthearted, so excited.

AT APPROXIMATELY this time Dan Hilliard stepped into a hotel where he was not likely to be known, asked for a messenger, then spoke to him quickly. The man nodded, showing no surprise as he accepted from Dan a white envelope and a five-dollar bill. In less than a minute the messenger was walking toward the offices of the city police department.

THE WALLINGS were not at home. Mr. Patterson returned to his truck and started to climb in, a little stiffly because of his arthritis; then he saw the man sitting in the cab of his truck.

"Just get in, Jack," the man said.

Mr. Patterson saw the revolver as he lifted himself up.

"Drive, Jack, and no hurry. Drive out east."

Mr. Patterson started the motor and glanced sideways at the huge man in the seat beside him. Mr. Patterson recognized the face, after perhaps ten seconds, and then he remembered the car parked in the Hilliard garage and the radio reports.

"Good Lord," he said aloud, "those poor people."

The man seemed pleased at this; he chuckled heavily.

Mr. Patterson had forgotten everything but Mrs. Hilliard's face as she wrote out his check a few minutes ago. The gun must have been pointed at her then, from the next room. Why hadn't he guessed that?

If he'd gone straight to a drugstore and called Jesse Webb, he might have helped them. Mr. Patterson had even jotted down the license number on a scrap of paper that was now in his pocket; he meant to ask Jesse Webb—Jesse would remember him because many was the night he'd played pinochle with young Jesse's father—whether the license was the one Mr. Patterson suspected it might be. Jesse'd have that sort of information.

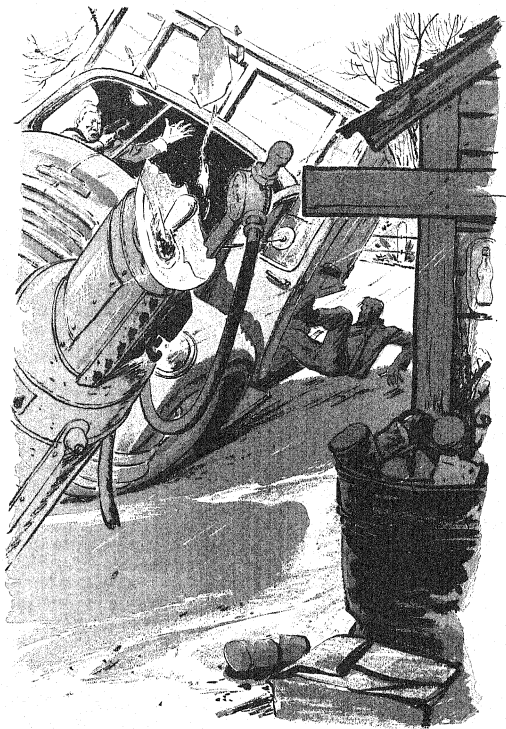
But he had done nothing. If anything happened to those people, he'd never forgive himself. It was then that he realized that what was going to happen now was to happen to him. His breathing became irregular, and the arthritis pain clenched in his right knee. But he didn't grow panicky. He made a silent plan.

They were east of the city now, on a country road. With his left elbow, very quietly, he pressed down on the door handle. Timing the click, he spoke simultaneously with it and in a loud tone: "Mister, I swear I'm not going to say a word to anybody!"

The man beside him laughed then. "Why don't you get down on your knees and pray, Jack?"

The door was open now. Ahead, Mr. Patterson saw two blue gasoline pumps set alongside the road, fairly close to the edge. There was a deserted and boarded-up service-station building, too.

Mr. Patterson waited till he was almost abreast of the pumps, then in one movement he whipped the wheel to the right, tramped hard on the accelerator and fell from the truck just as its nose struck the first pump. He hit the gravel and rolled, the stiffness of his leg forgotten, hearing the metallic crash above and behind him. He kept his body crouched low and ran toward the building.



He was within two yards of the weathered building when the first bullet reached him; then he heard the cracking, ear-bursting sound. He knew he had been hit; but what surprised Mr. Patterson, in the only moment he had left for surprise or any other emotion, was that the bullet did not burn or sear or scorch. It was more like a paralyzing but painless blow against his back. He didn't feel the second bullet at all. Nor the third.

IN HIS OFFICE, Dan Hilliard received a phone call from home. He listened, frowning. Then he said, "How can I do that, Ellie? The money should be here in less than an hour now. It's almost two o'clock."

He listened again. He couldn't believe what his wife told him; the incredibility of what she said smashed into the tension of his mind that had been straining toward 2:45 for hours now.

When he replaced the instrument Dan Hilliard did not know why he was being instructed by Glenn Griffin, through Eleanor, to do what he was now going to do. He felt a sour rage rise in him. He had been tricked. The money had not been mailed until after Griffin had talked to that woman on the phone last night. It could not be delivered until tomorrow. Griffin had known all along. He had lied in order to get him out of the house, in order to make it appear a normal day, without incident.

Now, however, there was an incident of some sort. In half an hour he and Cindy were to be parked in an area in front of a shopping center on the far east of the city. Why they were to be there, what would happen—Glenn Griffin had not told him.

THE PANTING was over now, the wild, animal terror was behind Robish. Back there a bit, crashing through the woods after he realized the truck wouldn't start, he had been scared. And sore. Mostly sore at that old guy, thinking he could pull a fast one. Remembering the old guy sent a warm, pleasant flush down Robish's massive body: the way the old guy'd tried to run, stiff-like, and then the way he stopped, kicking up the gravel with one foot, those skinny little arms going up, and then the way he sprawled. That memory had caused Robish to grin.

Glenn thought he was dumb. But was he? Hadn't he come out of the edge of the woods, picked the shopping center, found the telephone in the service station, made his call? Wasn't he waiting

here now, cozy and tight in the men's room, until the little redhead's car came for him? Robish was feeling great.

Glenn had said a half hour. Robish had no way to estimate time, but he figured maybe ten minutes had passed since he talked to Griffin, maybe twenty.

Then he heard, very faintly, the wail of a siren. It made him grin. But the grin twisted and left his face sagging. A lot could happen in half an hour. Maybe those cops'd work their way through the woods out onto the street.

Where was that redhead!

"CINDY'LL be back in a minute, Mr. Hilliard," Chuck Wright said. "She's taking dictation from Mr. Hepburn right now."

Chuck hadn't missed the sleepwalking aspects of Dan Hilliard's appearance and manner.

"How much longer?"

Chuck felt a twitch of annoyance at the man. "I couldn't say," he said, the irritation roughing his words. But he felt it ebb. "Won't you sit down, sir?" he said.

"Could you interrupt her?" Dan asked. "It's—important."

"Mr. Hilliard," Chuck said, "is something wrong? I mean—with Cindy? Or you? Someone?" Chuck shook his head in a bewildered way. "I don't mean to pry. At first I thought maybe Cindy was just giving me the brush. Now—"

"Now what?"

"I'm damned if I know."

And there it rested. It stayed there because all Dan Hilliard would say was what Cindy had said earlier in the afternoon: "You're imagining things, Chuck."

"It started last night," Chuck said stubbornly. He went over it all for Dan—the way she'd leaped out at him from the house, the way she'd insisted on being taken home after sitting in silence all evening, the abrupt tears in the car and the question about a gun.

"It doesn't figure, sir. That's all."

"It's not your business, Chuck."

"Maybe not, but—"

"No *maybes*. This is not your affair. Stay out of it."

"It's my business if it concerns Cindy, Mr. Hilliard."

The blue eyes snapped to attention. "So it's like that, is it?"

"It's like that," Chuck said, "whether you like it or not."

"I've no time to talk about it now. Or to think about it." The earlier urgency returned to the man. "Where's Hepburn's office?"

"I'll get her," Chuck said. He tapped on Mr. Hepburn's door. Whatever this thing was, it was bigger than any feeling Mr. Hilliard might bear toward him. It was beyond that, more desperate. He spoke a few brief words, saw Cindy rise without so much as turning to Mr. Hepburn, and run out the door. He followed. He saw Cindy join her father; there were a few muttered words between them. Cindy reached for her coat. Dan Hilliard was moving toward the corridor and Cindy followed.

Chuck stood staring at the closed door. All right. Now he'd have to find out on his own. *It's my business if it concerns Cindy*, his own words echoed back at him. That's the way it came to him. He loved Cynthia Hilliard.

He grabbed his own raincoat and strode from the office.

CHAPTER 4

AFTER HE had seen Dan Hilliard and Cindy turn into the parking lot where Cindy kept her car, Chuck Wright had a quick moment of panic. Would he lose them before he could get his car onto the street behind them? Cindy, he saw, did the driving and she was not wasting time; she swung north, and shot out of sight before Chuck could ease his low-slung sports job out of the parking lot.

In the midtown area no turns were permitted between noon and six, and it was this accident of timing that allowed him to narrow the distance until he saw the black coupe turn east. He followed. It was not difficult to keep Cindy's car in view, but he was careful to stay out of line of her rear-vision mirror.

A siren was such an ordinary and expected sound on a city thoroughfare that Chuck felt no surprise when the Sheriff's car whizzed past. But when an ambulance followed he began to think of an accident east of the city. Were the Hilliards now on their way to the scene? But, of course, that didn't explain last night, Cindy's startling tears and the question about the gun.

When, not twenty minutes later, Cindy's black coupe edged itself into a parking space before a new shopping center on the edge of the city, the siren wails were distant, well beyond the woods to

the northeast. Chuck drew to a halt behind the service station on the corner; he waved the attendant away and worked with the air hose at his rear wheels while he watched.

Almost at once, a man emerged from the service station—a ponderous bulk of man in a rain-soaked gray suit. The man approached Cindy's car, waited while Mr. Hilliard climbed out of the car, then slid his great body into the seat beside Cindy. Mr. Hilliard, with not so much as a nod of recognition, stepped back in and closed the door. The car shot forward.

Chuck didn't wait. He was well behind, but with the coupe in clear vision. The square mass of the strange man's head was between the other two. Who was he? What could a man like that have to do with the Hilliards? The black-sheep uncle? The family drunkard? The explanation was probably that simple.

Then what about the gun?

Chuck trailed the coupe all the way north, aware that it was the least populated way to Kessler Boulevard. He remained far behind, knowing that Cindy could recognize his car at once.

In the end, Chuck had no answer; the coupe pulled into the Hilliard driveway as he knew it would. Where does this leave you? he asked himself. Dead end.

"WHERE DOES it leave us, Jess?" Tom Winston asked, moving away from the frail outstretched body of the dead man.

Jesse Webb stepped to the two uprooted blue gasoline pumps and half leaned against the red truck. He spread out on the flat top of the fender the few pitiful belongings he had taken from Mr. Patterson's pockets: a dog-eared wallet, four single dollar bills, a chewed-at stub of pencil, odd scraps of paper, and nine checks, each for two dollars, payable to Floyd Patterson.

Jesse unfolded the scraps of paper, flattening them out: a grocery list, a garage repair bill marked paid, and one other.

"Shot in the back. Three times. Why, Jess?" asked Tom.

Jesse rubbed the back of his neck. "It's a good question, Tom. Why'd he try to smash into those pumps? Or was that an accident? You tell me, Tom."

"The truck won't go, so I figure the killer had to take off on foot. They've got ten men in those woods and more coming. My hunch is—"

"Hold it," Jesse Webb said, and then, very quietly, "Lord."

He was holding between his long fingers the last small scrap of soiled paper from Mr. Patterson's pocket. "Lord, Tom."

Winston bent over, studied the figures printed in pencil on the paper, then looked up into the thin face of Jesse Webb.

Far off a siren wailed. The sound cut through Jesse.

"He might've got just a quick glance," Winston said, beginning to breathe a little tightly himself. "He might've been in a hurry, y'know. That'd explain the 3."

"Maybe he heard it on the radio," Jesse drawled. "Maybe he jotted it down from the radio, just in case."

"People do that," Winston conceded. "But if you change the 3 to an 8, you got it. I reckon he was in a hurry, y'know, and his eyes not what they once was."

"Just for a while," said Jesse Webb slowly, "we're going to change that 3 to an 8. We'll just kind of pretend Mr. Patterson doesn't have a radio. We're going to pretend he saw that license, and then we're going to locate that car. I'm going to find out where he's been today, Tom, and you're going to start working backward on those checks—and all the rest of Mr. Patterson's customers. The works. That might include a hundred, two hundred people. This might be it." He was moving toward the Sheriff's car, in long swift strides. "We got the license. Now we're going to get that car. If they pick up anybody in the woods, give it to me fast. Tell 'em who we're looking for now."

"Now. WHAT ARE we going to do about that farmer's car out there in the garage? The car's hot now, Pop. Not like it was before, see. Our pal Robish here, he got jumpy and he didn't go through the old guy's pockets way he should."

"If you think I'm going to do any more of your dirty work for you, you're wrong." Hilliard's voice was level and empty and dry.

Glenn thought this was funny; he laughed; he even threw an arm over Hilliard's wide, thick shoulders. "Pop, you're smart and you got guts. But you got to be reasonable. Look at my position. The kid's been yammering at me all day to go. I can't go, I tell him. That dough'd come to your office tomorrow morning and I'd be miles away, and no chance to get my little job here in town taken care of. I worked for that money, Pop. Me and Hank. We can't throw any of it away."

The money wasn't worth it, thought Hank Griffin. He was

leaning against the paneled wall of the den, listening to them in the living room. Paying off Jesse Webb wasn't worth it. Nothing was worth sticking here now with a man dead and the cops liable to close in any minute! Another part of Hank's mind also cried, *These people have had enough!* His muscles throbbed with the certainty that they should go, move, get out. But Glenn always made the decisions. And he was usually right.

Dan Hilliard was shaking his head. "I don't know what to tell you. The car's safe enough in the garage. No one else is likely to come and if you try to take it out—"

"I'm not going to take it out, Hilliard. *You* are." The words silenced the room. "Soon as it gets good and dark out, you're going out there to the garage and you're going to take the license plates off and put on the ones from the redhead's coupe. You're too wise to start talking even if you get caught. Me, I trust you—because I got you where the hair's short. You listening, Hank? That's the only time you ever take a chance trusting anybody."

Lesson noted, Hank thought bitterly. He had to admit the truth of it, too. Glenn was reminding him that, the last time he'd pleaded with his brother to go, Glenn had warned him that Hilliard couldn't be trusted once they didn't have one of the family right alongside. This was why Glenn planned to take the wife and the girl along when they did leave. Hank had balked; not the girl. But Glenn's smile had withered his rebellion, even as Glenn had agreed with a shrug: *We'll take the kid then, it make you feel any better, Hank. Only don't go soft on me, see.*

Hank's eyes drifted again to the girl. She was watching her father. Hank remembered the way, last night, she'd said, *Thank you, Mr. Griffin.* That memory and the expression of pity on her beautiful face now caught Hank like a double blow to the stomach.

As Dan Hilliard said, "I'll dump the car in the river for you, Griffin; I know just the place," Hank couldn't take his eyes from the girl's lovely face, even though that was the source of his pain. It was almost, he realized, as if he wanted to suffer; he had never before had a chance to suffer about a girl, and he needed it. That need was part of his hunger.

"You play square with me, Pop," Glenn was saying, "and I'll play square with you, see."

Square? *Square!* When you plan to use his child as a shield! Not for the first time, but for the first time in this cold and single-

mindful way, Hank hated his brother. Glenn was the only person who had ever shown him any real kindness. Glenn had protected him from his father's brutal violence, from his mother's disdain. Yet under all the twisted trust and love, Hank hated him now. Facing that fact made Hank Griffin forget everything else, even the eternal prodding fear that perhaps the police were moving closer even now. . . .

WORKING with the city directory, Jesse had, by five o'clock, located the exact sites of the homes of those people who had written checks to Mr. Patterson in payment for trash removal. It was safe to assume that those who paid by cash were nearby. He had drawn a red-ink marking around the neighborhood, consisting of approximately ten square city blocks—perhaps two hundred homes, three stores, several vacant lots.

He shifted the map about on his desk. "I don't say they're in there, Tom. If they knocked off Mr. Patterson, they'd be damn fools to stay. But three human beings can't disappear into thin air. We got four cars up there, right? Tell 'em to park. Put one here, another here, and here and here. That covers the main roads out. My hunch is they won't go through the city to get away." He straightened and took a breath.

"Sorry to intrude, gentlemen," a voice said from the doorway. Carson, the FBI man, entered. "The city police, for some reason that I don't get, have been sitting on this since noon." He handed Jesse a sheet of white paper with a few words written on it in ink. "It came in at the station some time during the noon hour. A bellhop from one of the hotels brought it, and he gave four different descriptions of the man who paid him to deliver it."

Jesse read it, then passed it over to Tom Winston. Reading, Winston whistled softly. "Now we know," he said, at last.

"The idiot," Jesse Webb muttered.

"The man's on a spot, friends," Carson said.

"But he ought to know!" Jesse said. "He can't play ball with savages like that!"

"Easy now," Tom Winston said.

"But think of that poor guy, trapped in his own house—"

"What's this?" young Carson put in. He picked up the map.

"That's guesswork," Jesse Webb said, slumping into his chair.

"Plain and not-so-fancy guesswork by Deputy Sheriff Webb.

Look, Carson, isn't there some way to get word to that guy, whoever he is, that he can't play their game with them? They'll tear him to ribbons before they're done."

Carson lit a cigarette. "What would you do, Webb? Put yourself in his place. I think he was smart to write this thing. It might keep some itchy-fingered young cop from shooting a woman or a child. What would you do under the circumstances?"

"He'd play ball," Tom Winston told Carson, touching Jesse's shoulder with his fist.

"Yeah," said Jesse slowly. "I'd do just that, Tom."

DAN HILLIARD was aware that he drove a car that was wanted by the police; but the license plates from Cindy's coupe might throw off a questioning policeman, if, by some evil chance, a patrol car should notice him. He had tossed the old plates into a thicket along the side of a small street on which there were no houses and felt reasonably sure that he had not been seen.

Dan was within three blocks of the river bridge when he realized that a pair of headlights had been following him. He made a sharp left turn down a shabby street, then a right. He slowed then, carefully.

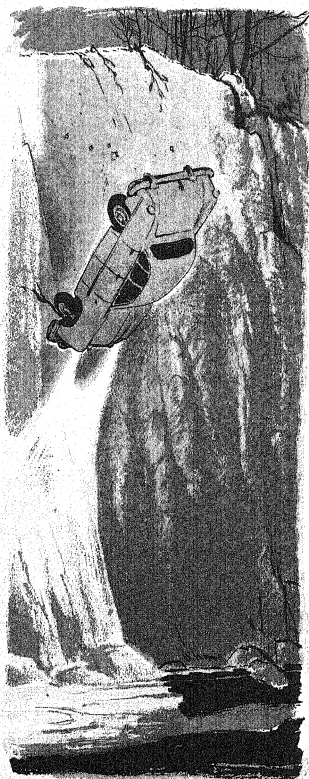
The twin lights swung into view in the mirror.

Dan felt no panic; he had passed beyond all that now. He took the next right, and chose a driveway that ran close alongside a dark house. Before his pursuer turned the corner, he flipped off his headlights, whipped the gray sedan into the driveway, and let it glide to a stop under the deeper shadow of a small frame garage. He waited.

Light flooded the street as the car that had been following picked up speed; the motor roar reverberated through the neighborhood. After the car had passed, Dan could hear the motor slowing, hesitating. In the moment that it passed, he could see nothing but its shape: it was a huge convertible.

Without stopping now to puzzle this out, he felt only a sharp relief that it was not a police car. When the convertible made a turn, Dan backed into the narrow street and nosed away, in the direction from which he had come.

Only when he was crossing the river bridge did Dan begin to wonder again about the identity of the convertible and its driver. Here was a whole new element, and his mind could not quite



bring it fully into the picture. Who could it be?

He dismissed the conjecture as he approached the place that he had in mind—a high cliff perhaps a hundred yards beyond the smooth wide pavement. He was searching for a place where he would turn off the road but he had only the vaguest impression of the area. Slowly he followed car ruts into a clump of trees and underbrush; to his relief, they led to the edge of the bluff.

He set the brake and clambered out, stood listening in the silence, with the headlight beams stabbing the darkness over the water. Down below, the river was almost soundless. He studied the grassy and bush-tangled shelf; there were no obstacles. The crash would be loud and there was the chance that it would attract attention. But Dan, at this point, had grown accustomed to calculating risks.

Sliding into the seat, his shoes clogged with mud, Dan backed so that he was far enough away from the edge of the cliff to gain the necessary momentum. Then he threw the car into forward gear, felt with his left

elbow to make sure the door was open, bore down on the gas, released the clutch, held the wheel steady, saw the black void rushing toward him. His ears filled with the crackling of tree limbs and roar of motor and the angry grind of tires in soggy earth.

He plunged sideways, feeling the jolt of hard earth under his body. Then the whole world filled to bursting with the thundering descent of the car. The sound echoed and reverberated, gnashing, crushing and ugly. The splash was abrupt; then came a series of gurgles and gasps, as though some living monster were battling for life below the edge of the bluff. Finally, the bubbling slackened into utter stillness.

Dan crawled to the precipice. Below, there was nothing. He stood up unsteadily, shaking. He was faced now with the hours-long walk back to the house.

DAN WAS crossing the river bridge, returning on foot by the same route he had traveled an hour ago in the gray sedan. Grif-fin, grinning, had been cruelly specific: "No cabs, Pop. Walk it. Do you good." Each step drove shocks of pain up his legs. He sagged against the stone buttress of the bridge, under a garish street lamp that cast his shadow before him. He caught a glimpse of the slump-shouldered figure of himself, outlined darkly on the wet pavement, small-looking and shriveled. He straightened, and plunged forward again. He found that, if he swung his legs forward, attaining a certain balance, he didn't drive the shafts of burning pain so high up into his body.

Without warning, then—he didn't even see the flash of headlights—a car screamed to a stop across the gleam of dark pavement. It looked familiar in a misty sort of way, as Dan stared at it. The police? A giddiness rose in him. When the door opened and a man stepped out and strode across toward him, he knew that he should turn and run. But he couldn't move.

"Mr. Hilliard. Let me take you home." Dan recognized Chuck Wright. "Come on, sir. I'll give you a lift."

Dan didn't reply. The impossibility of the encounter still held him and he was without will as he crossed the damp pavement, opened the door of the car and slid into the seat. The seat was soft, incredibly soft and giving, and he lowered his body into it with gratitude. He closed his eyes then and gave himself over to the luxury of softness and the close warmth of the car.

The young man's voice lifted him from it. "I'll have to know now, you see," Chuck Wright was saying.

Dan opened his eyes reluctantly. Chuck Wright drove a miniature sports car of foreign design. This was a larger car. "Is this your car?" Dan said.

"My father's. I borrowed it."

"Why?"

Chuck shrugged. "Carburetor on mine's acting up."

A lie, Dan Hilliard's mind cried, with renewed alertness. He had it now. This large car, a convertible, was the one he'd eluded back there before he crossed the river in the gray sedan. Chuck Wright had been following him then. Why?

"If you don't want to talk, sir, it can wait till we get to your house."

The significance of the young man's intention struck Dan for the first time then. How much had he guessed? Of one thing Dan was certain: Chuck Wright must be prevented from taking him all the way home. The boy wanted an explanation. He was stubborn and he would go into the house and demand to know what this was all about. Well then, Dan would give him an explanation.

The idea came to him from nowhere. "You haven't got a little drink on you, have you?" Dan asked.

He heard the abrupt catch of breath. "Not a drop," Chuck Wright said quietly.

"Damnation," Dan said. "Thought you were the drinking type, Chuck. You never know, do you?"

"No, you don't," Chuck agreed thinly.

"Shows to go you," Dan said. "Tell you what, Chuck, old fellow—now that you're into my little family secret, y'see, you can skip taking me home. Just drop me off at the liquor store nearest the house and I'll walk the rest of the way."

"Anything you say, Mr. Hilliard."

"Not shocked, are you, Chuck? You won't hold it against Cindy, will you? I'm always discreet about it. Notice the neighborhood I was in tonight? Nobody knows me there." He halted himself, for fear of going too far. He had made his point; the effect was in young Wright's set face. But what had he forgotten?

Then it came to him, in the long silence, and he spoke again: "Lost my car tonight. Gray car." He lowered his voice: "Own private car, for own private pleasures."

After that, more silence as the miles rolled by. Had he covered everything now? Did Chuck believe him?

The stiff silence held until Chuck stopped in front of the lighted store in which, only last night, Dan had bought the whiskey for Robish. "It's a long walk from here to your house," Chuck said.

"Wouldn't want to embarrass Cindy, would we, Chuck?" he said in conspiratorial tones. "Cindy already embarrassed enough about her father. Worried sick. Poor Cindy."

Standing unsteadily but not drunkenly on the sidewalk, Dan heard Chuck Wright's "Good night," clipped and short—no "sir" now. When the red taillights had blurred in the distance, he stepped from the curb, crossed the still damp street.

A cloud of astonishment filled his brain: where had the cunning come from? How had he thought to make up that story? And, more important, had he been believed?

Even though he stayed on a dim and untraveled street, walking east, he saw a police car halfway down the second block. But the possible meaning of what he saw didn't strike him fully until, three blocks later, he saw another. A wide white stripe ran down the side of the car, and he made out the words "State Police." This time he almost broke into a run.

An awesome urgency drove him forward. A few minutes later, he was turning into his own driveway. Nothing moved, inside the house or out. The profound quiet sent him charging the last few yards to the side door. The living room was deserted. What did it mean? He rattled the door handle, calling in a whisper. Cindy appeared then, coming across the living room swiftly. When she faced him, he knew that it had not been his approach that had caused the terrible silence.

Cindy was white. Not pale. White. "It's Ralphie," she said, her voice quivering.

CHAPTER 5

FOR POSSIBLY five seconds Dan Hilliard stood motionless in the hall, held rigid in the shock of stark terror over the nightmare scene before him.

He saw Eleanor on the lower steps, her eyes unrecognizable with fright. He heard Cindy pause behind him on the edge of the

living room. Glenn Griffin lounged in the dining-room doorway across the hall. Dan saw Robish then, his face a blackish-red now. The big man turned the revolver on Dan.

"Where's Ralphie?" Dan asked.

"Upstairs," Eleanor said quickly. "Sleeping."

Glenn Griffin's dark eyes glinted. "This time I ought to let Robish handle him. That kid's going to foul up everything."

"Put that gun away," Dan said in a dry whisper.

It might have been the whispered tone, or it might have been the squared hulk of Dan's body; whatever caused it, Glenn took a step toward Robish.

"Forget it, Robish," Griffin advised. "The old lady covered it on the phone. That teacher don't suspect a thing."

It occurred to Dan to ask what all this meant, but everything was happening too fast. He saw Robish lower the gun then, almost automatically; but the downward arc broke. Something came over the brute face; there was a hardening of his jaw muscles. "You don't give the orders any more," the heavy voice said. "I got this now." Not so slowly then, he brought the gun up again, and this time it was directed at Glenn Griffin's belt.

Robish had forgotten Ralphie now—and whatever Ralphie had done to rouse that murderous instinct—and Dan could see the slow grinding of that dull and unpredictable mind behind the massive forehead. Glenn Griffin saw it, too.

With the gun inching toward his stomach, clutched in the dark hairy hand of the big man, he began to laugh. At first it was a defiant crackle of sound, but staring at the intensity on Robish's face, he seemed abruptly to lose control and the laugh died in a series of odd gurgles. His hands came up to his face, fluttered there, and then his jaw was working without sound.

Glenn Griffin uttered a long but broken breath that sounded like, "Come on, now, Robish—"

At this Robish bellowed—a wild, animal cry, vast and awesome and hollow, the cave of mouth open.

Glenn Griffin's terror-stricken words caught and reflected Dan's immediate thought: "You're nuts, Robish." But as he heard the words, Dan knew at once that Griffin could not have said anything more dangerous. Robish brought the point of the revolver against the young man's stomach in a vicious jab that doubled Griffin over with a cry of pain. Then he began to slither

toward the floor, his hands still fluttering in that odd terrified way at his chin.

"Yeh, I'll nuts, Griffin!" Robish bawled. "Doing your dirty work. You, you're the general, ain't you? I konk the guard, I plug the old guy, I—"

Then, from above, from the darkness of the upper hall, another voice cut across Robish's low snarl: "Throw it on the floor, Robish."

Robish turned his head, peered unseeing into those shadows. Hank Griffin, still invisible above, spoke again.

"Throw it on the floor, Robish. Now."

Dan was watching Robish, wondering. He saw the temptation to whirl firing; he saw that slow, prison-broken mind tearing its attention from Glenn Griffin, who half lay against the doorframe. Then he saw Robish toss the gun to the rug.

At the head of the stairs there was no movement. The house seemed locked in unnatural stillness. Finally, Glenn leaned over and picked up the revolver. He stood up, very slowly, reached for his swagger, lifted his shoulders. Then his eyes met Dan's.

With a start Dan caught the furious glare of shame: the memory of those few moments of clawing terror and the knowledge that Dan and the others had stood witness to the cowardice. What would this mean? In what direction would it push Griffin?

Behind him, Dan heard his daughter take a deep draft of breath. Then, breaking the silence, Hank Griffin came down the stairs, stepping quickly. He paused on the bottom step, glanced at Robish, who stood bearlike and still now, his arms dangling; then at his brother. What Dan heard then was not so much the content of the younger Griffin boy's words as the flattened note of finality in his tone: "Let's go, Glenn."

Glenn Griffin frowned, said nothing.

"This is our chance, Glenn," Hank said. "We can't hold them and Robish, too. This is going on too long. The cops are bound to get here sooner or later. They're not dumb. And that teacher. The one the kid slipped the note to. How do you know there wasn't some smart cop right at her elbow?"

"Don't get jumpy, kid."

"I'm not jumpy!" Hank Griffin cried suddenly, and Dan saw his mouth trembling oddly. "But I'm not going to the chair just 'cause Robish got trigger-happy and you let him. You think the cops ain't working on that right now?"

Shut up," Glenn Griffin said sullenly.

Hank shook his head deliberately. "Come with me, Glenn."

Glenn lifted his shoulders. "After we get the dough."

"*What good's the dough gonna do you in the death house?*" Hank was shouting then, his mouth twisting and out of control.

Robish watched this with no expression.

"You heard me," Glenn Griffin said then. "We're gonna stay, see. I'm going to pay off Webb. I got to have that dough for Flick so he'll take care of Webb."

"Then I'm going, Glenn. By myself."

After that, the silence came back, intensified.

Finally Glenn Griffin grinned. "Go ahead, kid. On your own they'll have you back in stir in less'n an hour."

Hank Griffin moved into the lighted living room.

"Dammit!" Glenn Griffin yelled. "You'll do what I say, you little jerk! I got you this far, both you dumb cons, and I'll get you the rest of the way!"

Hank did not pause until he reached the door of the sunroom; then he turned. "Yeh," he said bitterly, low, "you got me this far. And where is that, I'm asking you. We're all headed for the chair, that's where. Only count me out." Then his voice dropped even lower: "Come along, Glenn."

"I oughta—" Both guns came up at the same instant. Hank Griffin was shaking his head.

"It'd break my heart, Glenn, but I'd do it. So long, Glenn."

Hank Griffin backed through the sunroom door, turned and ran, his steps sharp on the tiled porch.

"He's gonna take the car," Robish said.

Glenn Griffin touched the light switch, plunged them all into darkness; Dan felt him brush past, heard the window overlooking the driveway grind open. "Stay away from that car, you dumb punk!"

Outside, a door on Cindy's coupe slammed. The motor turned over, caught, purred.

Above this sound Dan heard another. It was Glenn Griffin shouting wildly, a long series of blasphemy and lewdness erupting from the frustration in him.

HANK traveled west four full blocks before he saw the first patrol car. He made a sharp right turn, so that he wouldn't have

to pass it. A half block farther on he saw another. This time there was no way for him to avoid passing it.

He touched the automatic in his pocket. He'd use it if he had to. His palms were cold and moist.

As he drove past the patrol car, he knew that he was forgetting something about Cindy's coupe, something important that made it dangerous. He should have taken the blue sedan. But why? Whatever it was about this car, though, the coppers didn't notice. He watched his rear-view mirror. They didn't follow.

He turned west again, at the first street he saw, and he had gone perhaps two miles when he realized the significance of those two police cars parked that close to the Hilliard house. He'd been right: the cops were wise. But the triumph wouldn't come. He'd been right, but what about Glenn back there? What was going to happen now to that girl?

Funny, though—now that he was away from her, what happened to her didn't seem so important. There was never anything he could have done anyway about what Glenn planned after he had the money. The girl was going along in the car then to make the escape look natural and to act as a shield.

Only a few cars approached or passed now, in the late night. He rolled down the window at his elbow. The sharp, cold air felt fine. But underneath the sensation of freedom, there was a feeling of uncertainty stirring. Back at the house, Hank had had a definite plan. Now he couldn't remember exactly what it was. Something about heading west, then doubling back to the Chicago road that would be comparatively free farther north. He could be in Chicago by morning.

He glanced at the gauges. There was less than half a tank of gas. And no money. Only the few coins he'd fished out of that desk drawer in the den. He'd have to pull a job—on his own.

This thought, together with the idea of a strange big city like Chicago where he knew no one, made him go weak clear through.

THE WHOLE house was dark now. It was after eleven. In Ralphie's room, Dan flipped on a lamp. He heard his son stir on the bed, and watched him sit up.

Rebellion curled and twisted in Dan. He couldn't do it. They were demanding too much. Was it ever going to stop? So much was happening now, and so fast, that he had not even had time

police cars, the clash between Robish and Glenn, Hank Griffin's departure alone, the uneasy and suspicious realliance between Griffin and Robish. Now this.

Ralphie stared up at his father as Dan closed the door. "That Miss Swift," Ralphie said, shaking his head. "Teaches fifth grade, but what a dope. Thought I was playing a game."

"Thank the Lord she did, Ralphie," Dan said, not moving.

Ralphie caught a hint of threat, and he frowned.

But he was no more amazed at his father's presence than Dan was. Dan could not do what he had been commanded to do. That command from Glenn Griffin was an attempt to reassert his control after his brother walked out, and an attempt to placate Robish.

Junior had to get smart again, see, Glenn Griffin had explained downstairs. While you was out, his teacher comes to call. Just passing by, she says, and wondering about the kid's health 'cause he missed school today. I'm in the den and your wife, she handles things clever. The teacher don't suspect a thing. Then Ralphie comes down and gives her a book to take back to school. I'm going nuts but what can I do? Then an hour later maybe, she calls up. She's found a note in the book, see. She says she don't believe a word of it. But she thought the brat's mother ought to know the silly kind of games her son plays. You're going up there now, Hilliard, and you're going to make Junior understand we ain't playing games. You give him a lacing, Pop, or I'll let Robish do it for you.

"Ralphie," Dan said now, "wasn't last night bad enough? Next time they'll shoot somebody." His voice rose to a cry. "Ralphie, do you want them to shoot your mother?"

"No, no. All I wrote was that we needed help. I said we were prisoners. Aren't we?"

"Ralphie," Dan shouted, "do you want your mother to be killed? Can't you understand? Aren't you old enough?" Dan grabbed Ralphie's arms and began to shake him.

"Ralphie," he pleaded in a harsh whisper as the violence of his shaking increased, "Ralphie, listen to me, start crying! Please! You've got to cry now! Ralphie! Start crying!"

But the body was stiff between his hands. Dan let go then, stood up, thinking of the delight Robish would find in what he was doing with such pain and reluctance; he lifted his hand, brought it down across the small face, and he heard the sound, saw the eyes pop open, and went instantly sick and empty.

The tears came then, and the astonishment and hurt that he had expected. Ralphie was crying, loud; Dan listened with mingled self-loathing and relief. Then he caught his son to him as he kneeled and felt the boy's hot tears against his own cheek.

"Cry, son," he was whispering softly, "go on and cry."

And in the words he recognized his own longing, the pent-up frustration and anger. He was holding Ralphie to him, close, wishing he dared give himself over to his own fierce hunger for tears, for any release whatever from the pressures building dangerously in his aching body.

IN THE morning you'll have the answer, Chuck Wright was telling himself as he drove aimlessly in his father's convertible. In the morning you'll get the answer from Cindy herself and you won't take any more run-around.

You must have passed this same corner at least ten times, he thought vaguely, but his mind was not on his driving. Why had Mr. Hilliard lied about being a drunkard? You didn't swallow that story, of course, especially after you saw him go plunging homeward without going into the liquor store at all. And he no longer staggered then; he walked fast and steady, like a man in a desperate hurry.

Desperate. There's the word. Cindy and Mr. Hilliard: they acted like desperate people. But desperate about what? Why?

At this point, he caught a red glare in his rear-view mirror. There was no siren blast but a dark prowler car eased alongside him, edged him to the curb, in silence. The red light went off. Chuck Wright, frowning, sat waiting.

JESSE WEBB was glad for any excuse for action. Helen Lamar had apparently dropped out of existence in or near Columbus, Ohio. And while Jesse had one certain piece of knowledge now—that Griffin was in or near the city, or had been around noon today when the anonymous letter was written—the knowledge added up to very little until someone made a move. He was hoping that the report he had just received meant that someone had made a move.

"Bring him in as soon as he gets here," he instructed a trooper. "And keep those patrol cars out of sight best you can."

He said to Tom Winston, "What's so suspicious, Tom? A guy's

driving a convertible in the neighborhood. Is that against the law?"

"Why should he drive round and round in all kinds of circles?" Tom Winston asked. "Here? Tonight? It's worth asking. Here he is, Jess."

Jesse Webb looked up into a young face: mid-twenties, questioning but unfrightened eyes, maybe a little defiant. Tweed topcoat, expensive; no hat.

"Having a good time?" Jesse inquired laconically.

"I don't follow."

"Been drinking?"

"No."

"Let's have your driver's license."

Without hesitation, the young man took his license from his wallet, laid it in front of Jesse.

"Charles Wright," Jesse read aloud. "Business?"

"Attorney. Hepburn and Higgins. Guaranty Building."

"Anything else?"

"Anything else what?"

In a swift and unreasonable wave of irritation, Jesse Webb stood up. "Look, Mr. Wright, let's not be cagey. I reckon you can't get in any trouble unless you got something to hide. What have you been up to the last hour? Play ball."

"I'll play ball, Deputy," Charles Wright said then, "but I ought to know what this is all about."

Jesse Webb's voice was hoarse now. "Three rats broke out of the federal pen in Terre Haute yesterday morning. Don't you read the papers, man? Don't you listen to the radio?" As Charles Wright shook his head, Jesse caught a certain quick alertness in the gray eyes. "Well, we have reason to believe these men are in town. The fact is, Mr. Wright, they might be in this neighborhood you were cruising around, maybe in one of the houses around there." He stopped then, certain that a change had taken place on the face before him. "What's up, kid?" he asked curtly.

"Nothing."

"Damn it, don't lie to me!" Jesse barked. "Your face looks like I just kicked you!"

"Well, I just never—thought of anything like that. It just happens that my girl friend lives around there, that's all. And I got the crazy idea just now, when you said—"

"What's her name, Wright?"

There was a slight pause that Jesse Webb didn't like.

"Her name's Allen," Charles Wright said. Then, and very firmly and convincingly, "Constance Allen. But I saw her go into her house just a little while ago. I'm sure she's all right."

"You *saw* her go in? You brought her home?"

"Well, no. Y'see, that's the pitch. I might as well tell the truth. She was out with another guy tonight. That's why I've been hanging around. It's just one of those things. I guess I ought to be ashamed. Being jealous, I mean."

"What's her address, Mr. Wright?" Jesse asked wearily.

"I don't know the exact number," Charles Wright said. "But she works in our office downtown, and of course I know the house. It's on Oxford."

"Okay," Jesse said slowly, heaving a sigh. "Go on home now, kid, and go to sleep. Forget this happened, hear? Forget it."

Charles Wright turned to the door, but the deputy's voice stopped him. "One more thing, Mr. Wright. I want you to read this letter and then think about the way the guy who wrote it feels. Maybe then you won't be tempted to talk this up anywhere."

Jesse Webb watched the younger man read the letter and he saw going through Charles Wright the same feelings that he himself had experienced when he read those pitiful words.

"I guess it'd be pretty dangerous to try to close in, wouldn't it, Deputy?"

"Dangerous for those scum," Jesse Webb said grimly.

"I was thinking of—" But Charles Wright didn't finish; he turned on his heel and opened the door.

"The boy's got a good question there, Jess," Tom Winston said.

"What *do* you have in mind? If they were nice and cozy in that Allen house on Oxford Street, let's say."

"We're not at that point yet," said Jesse. "Let's take a look at that map. Did you get the rest of the names filled in?"

"Most of them are there. But you can't be sure, Jess. We haven't had time to do all the cross-checking we should. No directory's up to the minute, Jess."

"Oxford Street. Here we are."

They studied it together, heads bent over the table. Finally Jesse stood up. "I don't see any Allen on Oxford, Tom," he said, very slowly.

"NO, BUT—"

"Now, Tom, you've got something to do. Find out where that kid lives, who his girl friend really is, where she lives. If nothing breaks around here by morning, I might want to talk to young Mr. Wright again."

Behind the wheel again, Chuck Wright kept telling himself: You've got the whole picture now and it's much worse than anything you dreamed of.

He drove south to his father's house, parked the convertible in the garage. He was remembering, as he climbed into his small black car, the way he'd lied to the police with the same instinctual cleverness and cunning that had prompted Mr. Hilliard to invent that story of his drunkenness.

Now he backed into the street, fully intending to drive downtown to his club. Then he brought the car to a halt, hearing again Cindy's words, *Do you have a gun, Chuck?* He jumped out of the car, walked into his parents' house and up to the attic. Only Mattie, the maid, was at home and she stood by, watching, question marks all over her old face. Chuck came down in about ten minutes. It had taken him that long to find the rather odd-shaped Japanese automatic he had brought home from the Orient, a war souvenir. When he climbed back into the car, he had the gun in his hip pocket, loaded.

Chuck headed south, away from the Hilliards' home. Take it slow now, he was warning himself. Cindy doesn't want the police to know. Mr. Hilliard is desperate that no one know. No one will thank you if you try to play hero here and something goes haywire.

But Cindy is in that house.

He tramped on the gas and the car shot forward, going nowhere, aimless.

The police should be told. He was not doing the proper or legal thing in working against the police. But the police is not one man, a predictable human being; the police includes all sorts of human beings. Take that lanky deputy. *Dangerous for those scum*, he had growled venomously. No thought of the Hilliards. His job was to capture or kill those three wanted men. Probably the man was bucking for a promotion.

He finally brought the car to a halt in front of the club. He went inside, picked up the evening papers at the desk, took the elevator to his room. In the *Times* he found pictures of the three escaped

convicts. A poisonous bitterness rose in him as he studied their faces. Then, in one sudden violent motion of his hand, his fist crashed into the floor lamp, sent it spinning across the room, against the far wall. The bulb exploded. The room was plunged into darkness. He stood panting, legs apart, the savage violence still unspent in him.

That's it, he told himself harshly, smash up the furniture. Go to pieces. That'll help a lot.

Chuck was thinking of Dan Hilliard and he was beginning to breathe more steadily. The picture of Mr. Hilliard brought a slow but expanding respect—and, with it, something quite different. That something was shame. He remembered the way he had looked upon Mr. Hilliard and his life—conventional, dull, empty.

A man doesn't fight like that for an empty life. He fights for what is precious to him, the way you are going to fight, by doing nothing, for someone who is precious to you.

You are not going to do a thing, Chuck. Nothing.

He took the gun from his pocket and placed it on top of the bureau in the dark.

You are going to be calm and forget any ideas about going near that house until those men have gone.

Without turning on the overhead lights, Chuck began to empty his pockets. He came across a foreign object. He examined it with his fingers for a full minute before he recognized it. It was the key to the rear door of the Hilliards' house. He held it tight in his wet palm.

Was there some way in which he could make use of it?

HANK GRIFFIN, unaware of it, was driving a car without license tags. Several hours ago Dan Hilliard had removed them from Cindy's coupe and placed them on the gray sedan. They were now at the bottom of the river. Hank was on the western edge of the city, heading toward the main east-west highway, U.S. 40. He had caught sight of a clock back there, reading 1:45. His thoughts now had one direction: to get in touch with Glenn. He had to reach a telephone. There was one place, and only one, that he could think of: an all-night restaurant. Where were the all-night joints? On the highways. So he was sticking to his original plan, to get out of town. Only this time, instead of cutting back to the Chicago road, he would call Glenn. He would warn

min. He would suggest that Glenn meet him, that they go to Chicago and then send for Helen Lamar.

After Hank made his call, all his worries would be over. Let Glenn dope it all out. A surge of joy lifted in him now, pushing back the early-morning chill.

He made a right turn on the highway, heading west. A huge truck charged past, then nosed off the highway to the right. Hank had to whip the wheel over hard to avoid hitting the rear end of the trailer, and he was twenty yards beyond the diner before he realized the reason for the truck's stopping. He had almost passed the phone. He jammed on the brakes, pulled the coupe onto the shoulder of the road and climbed out.

The air, raw and windy, struck him full across the face. He walked across the parking area, up three steps, into the metal-gleaming interior.

Almost at once, he saw the black phone attached to the tile wall near a side door in the rear. Hank went to the phone, looked up Daniel Hilliard in the directory. He hated looking up names. The alphabet confused him. His nerves were jumping. He shouldn't be here now, anyway.

He had the number now. He dialed slowly, his eyes on the numbers, one by one. Then the phone rang, and he heard the voice at the other end of the line—Hilliard's. He spoke sharply, "I'm calling Mr. James," remembering the name Glenn had told Helen Lamar to use.

Then it was that he caught the flash of dark blue in the doorway of the diner, across the shine of counter. He recognized the wide-brimmed hat and his eyes dropped down the uniform. The trooper was young, and he was leaning across, speaking to the counterman, as Hank heard his brother's voice on the other end of the line, low and hard:

"Hello? Hello? Who is it?"

"Hank," he said, but he had gone stiff and helpless, and the word was a whisper.

It was all he said, because the blue moved around the corner of the counter toward him. Hank replaced the earpiece and took one step, waiting, remembering in a flash that it was a murder charge this time, and that meant the chair. The broad bony face blurred before his eyes, and he dropped his hand carelessly into his pocket.

"That your black coupe out there, mister?" a twanging voice asked, not unpleasantly. "You know you don't have any license plates on her?"

Already, though, Hank's hand was moving, and too late, with the gun in mid-air, he realized that there was no cause for him to fire. The trooper hadn't recognized him. But by then the trigger was snapping and the explosion thundered in the small room. The trooper bent forward, his head twisting sideways, his hand clawing at his holster.

With the acrid smell of the gunpowder slapping back at him, Hank fired once again, missing, the bullet smashing into the plate-glass window. Then he whirled, lunged out the side door and ran.

The cold air took his breath. He saw a parked truck, made for it, expecting each instant to feel a bullet against his spine. Behind the body of the truck, he stopped, crouching. The coupe was in the opposite direction, beyond the diner. There was a flat, fenced field, but no cover, in front of him.

Glenn, his mind cried. Glenn, what now?

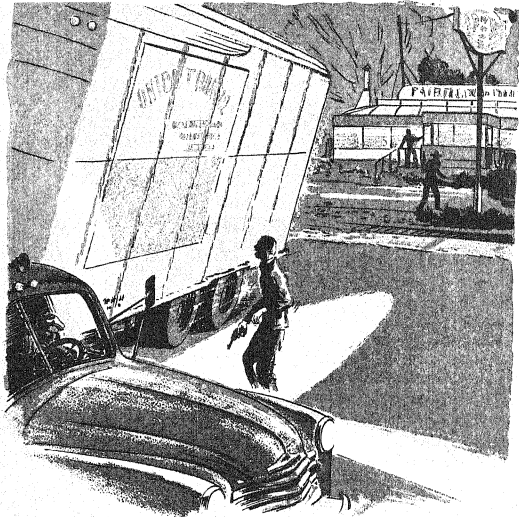
A spotlight flicked on in front of the diner, roamed uncertainly over the truck. Another trooper in a car! Hank began to curse. Vaguely he knew that they'd close in if he continued to stand here, but he was thinking, with shock, of the face of the man he had just shot and he was remembering Glenn's words: *They'll have you back in stir in less'n an hour.*

Then a bullet struck the earth by his foot. They were firing at his legs, firing under the truck.

Glenn!

Wildly, then, he turned and ran. He had no idea in what direction he was going, but he was afraid of the flatness of field beyond the fence and he could only think of crossing the highway, finding cover on the other side. Even then, though, he knew that he was not going to make it. Despair slowed his working legs. His shoes hit the pavement as a bullet whined past his shoulder, and he knew the blinding blast of the spotlight was on him as he half stumbled, half ran to the middle of the highway. He felt the lance of pain then; it leaped scalding up his leg from his calf and he stopped, without going down.

Then he saw the truck charging along the highway, the world-sweeping glare of lights. Rooted there, and with the pain stabbing



upward to his brain, he heard the roar of motor, the hiss of air brakes. He stood upright, frozen in the blast of horn, as the fender brushed safely past at an angle. Then the spotlight beam caught the solid mass of silver-colored trailer that swung flatly at him as cab and trailer buckled. Everything then was intense and terrible and in detail. He knew every second of it, saw it all, realized its meaning, his mind feebly whimpering that it should not be so. The blinding, glimmering wall of trailer took forever to reach him, its sidewise progress slowed by the rubbery protest of gripping tires.

Then it was upon him, and the moment of death itself brought amazement: it had happened—and to him.

CHAPTER 6

AT ABOUT 2:15 in the morning, Chuck Wright was roused by a knock on the door. He stood up, padded in bare feet across the small bedroom and flipped on the overhead lights before he opened the door. He stood looking into the face of Deputy Sheriff Jesse Webb.

"I couldn't sleep, Mr. Wright," Jesse drawled, and stepped in; his glance did not miss a thing, including the broken lamp and the fact that Chuck still wore shirt and trousers, not pajamas.

Jesse sat down on the edge of the bed. "We're slow, Mr. Wright, but in time we get it. You could save us time. And my hunch is those people up there only got a certain amount of time to spare. You know what people I refer to?"

Chuck Wright said, "No. You think I should?"

"I know you *do*," Jesse said with slow disgust. "Stop stalling, Wright. You're a lawyer; you know you can't cribbage around with the police like this. Listen to me. There's no one named Allen lives on Oxford. If you don't start talking now, I'm gonna slap a charge against you and you can get that law firm to go to work for you. But before they can do anything, I'm going to get the name of those folks one way or the other, badge or no badge."

"Stop rubbing your knuckles, Deputy," Chuck Wright said easily, but not angrily. "I don't bully."

Jesse Webb stood up, strolled over to the bureau, picked up the Japanese automatic, gave it a thorough examination, even checking the clip. Then he simply stared at Chuck Wright, waiting.

"I've got a permit," Chuck said at last.

"Permit be hanged!" Jesse barked. "What'd you have in mind for this, Wright? And don't take me around any more curves!"

"I don't want to have to use it," Chuck said then, slowly.

Jesse Webb lifted his brows once. Then he said, almost too casually: "What's her name?"

"Maybe it's my own family," Chuck said, stalling.

Jesse Webb smashed his right fist into his left palm. "Your folks came home an hour ago from the Meridian Hills Country Club, and you were in their house earlier. Now let's have it. What's her name?"

Chuck Wright took a deep breath. All right, Deputy. You've got it right—so far. But I'm not going to give you the name, and I'll tell you why. They've gone to a lot of trouble—Lord knows how much—to keep this from getting to the police."

"What do you think I'm going to do when I find out, blow up the house to get those rats?"

"What *will* you do?" Chuck Wright asked.

The question riled Jesse Webb, because of his own uncertainty. "I'll be ready for them, that's what."

This brought Chuck up sharply against his basic fear. "There can't be any shooting when they go, either. You read that letter."

Jesse Webb shouted, "I know that, too!"

"But there might be. You can't control that completely, can you, Deputy? State Police, FBI, the city cops—one guy, just one man, might be tempted to try to pick one of them off when they come out." He took hold of the deputy's arm with both hands. "There can't be any bloodshed because it won't be just those vermin who get it. You know who'll be killed, don't you?"

After that, there was a long silence. The tall man removed Chuck's hands, but without annoyance. Shaking his head, he said in a soft, almost gentle manner, "There's going to be blood, boy. You better get that straight right now. Glenn Griffin's not going to take anybody along for a ride and then just drop 'em off and thanks for the pleasant company. So when the time comes, we're going to get as many of those three as possible without sacrificing anyone else. What else can we do, boy?"

"I couldn't make that decision for *them*. I can't tell you, Deputy. I'm sorry."

Jesse turned abruptly away. "Okay, kid. I honestly don't know what I'd do if I was in your shoes. But I'm in mine, and I got a job. So that's the way it is. If I make a mistake—"

The ringing of the telephone cut across his words. Without so much as a glance at Chuck, Jesse picked it up. "H'lo." Then: "Speaking." The tall man listened, his eyes swinging slowly to rest on Chuck. "Dead?" Again he listened. "What about the trooper?" He nodded automatically. "Fifteen minutes, Tom."

Chuck's voice had frozen in his throat.

"Put on your shoes, boy. I'm going to show you the kind of filth you're letting this girl of yours take chances with. It may be good news, kid. One of 'em's dead."

DEAD SEEMED to Chuck Wright an inadequate word when applied to the thing at which he stared, along with Deputy Webb, eighteen minutes later. He was sick. Flushed and faint, he turned away, took a few uncertain steps along the edge of the highway.

"You sure it's him?" Jesse Webb was asking.

"It's the young one all right, Jess," the fat deputy said.

Another voice caused Chuck to turn, the voice of a man in State Police uniform. His voice was hard: "MacKenzie didn't even know the slob had a gun."

Jesse prowled away, inclining his head toward the fat man. "What about the car? Who does it belong to? Where'd he get it?"

As Chuck turned and walked slowly along the highway, making his way toward the car parked at an odd angle on the shoulder of the road, he heard behind him: "It's gonna take some time to trace the car 'cause there are no plates on her. I've roused Bonham out of bed, though, to start work on the motor serial. That'll take forever. Then there's the gun—if it's registered at all, that is. Nothing else in the car to help. Only it looks like it might belong to a woman. Few bobby pins—"

Chuck, with the man's voice fading behind him, was five yards from the coupe. The sight of it reached him with the impact of a blow. He had no idea how long he stood there, limp and suddenly cold again.

"Well, kid?" Jesse Webb's voice asked near his ear. "You know who that belongs to? Save us a lot of time."

But Chuck only shook his head. Sirens, spotlights, tear gas and a machine gun set up on the Hilliard lawn? No thanks. He walked back to the shadowy circle of spectators, found a man whose cap he had noticed earlier. "Your cab here? You want a fare?"

"Yes, sir," the taxi driver said. "A man's stomach can only take so much."

Chuck climbed into the back seat, gave the driver the address of his club. He had the key to the back door of the Hilliard house hard in his palm. An idea had returned to him, an idea he'd had when he first learned what was happening to the Hilliards. Perhaps there *was* something he could do.

JESSE WEBB had, in the last few hours, almost forgotten whatever personal reasons he might once have imagined important in this case. What concerned him now was the plight of that family,

the man who wrote that letter. As yet, he hadn't even reached the question of what Hank Griffin's actions tonight might mean in relation to those people and to the other two convicts. Jesse would get to that, though. He was working his way to the name of the family in the most laborious and roundabout manner.

Before he could believe it, however, the long wait for essential information was over. He looked up from the counter of the highway diner and saw Tom Winston half turning from the phone, motioning to him with one beefy hand. They went outside, using the door through which Hank Griffin had plunged just before his death. "The gun," Tom said. "Griffin's little black automatic. It's registered in the name of Daniel C. Hilliard."

That was all there was to it. After all those hours, it was as simple as that. Jesse's mind did not have to go over, one by one, the names of the people who had written checks to Mr. Patterson yesterday morning. The name *Eleanor Hilliard* leaped sharp and clear to the foreground of his thoughts. He had it all, and there was in him no particular triumph. Only a slow, cold something stirring far down inside.

He began giving instructions, in a low and controlled voice.

FORTY-FIVE minutes later—it was almost four o'clock—Jesse Webb, driving a dark-brown car, the appearance of which could not be associated with the police, was approaching the Hilliard house from the west on Kessler Boulevard. In a very short time now, he would have a complete report on Daniel C. Hilliard and family, but he could already judge a few things for himself: good income, excellent neighborhood, not upper crust but middle-class comfortable.

Four patrol cars had been alerted, their positions shifted to cover the exit routes from the Hilliard house. But they had no instructions yet as to what to do in the event Griffin and Robish attempted to escape with any member of the Hilliard family.

Slowing down, Jesse held the car to a steady pace as he passed the house. It was rather large, set off by itself, flat fields to the west of it, and two or three vacant and wooded lots to the east. The windows were dark. In the driveway, there was a recent-model blue sedan with its nose pointed toward the street.

Then he was passing the woods, coming abreast of the closest house. Walling, his memory reminded him, Ralph Walling.

Across the boulevard from the Hilliards there was only an expanse of meadow. They chose well, he said to himself in grim silence, wishing that he had more time to study the exact locations of the porches, garage, doors. But he had a fairly accurate picture now. At the first street he made a left turn, remembering from the map that it was not an ordinary block here; there was no cross street or road behind the Hilliard house—that is, north of it—for perhaps a quarter of a mile. It was this area behind the house in which he was particularly interested as he turned left again on the graveled back road that paralleled the boulevard.

If a man made his way through the dense woods in the rear of the Hilliard property, and if he could approach the house unseen from behind, especially in the heavy darkness now . . .

Jesse's first job was to find a place for a lookout, a place where a man could keep watch on the Hilliard house. This was what he was working on when he caught sight of a gleam in the woods which caused him to come to a halt. When he walked back to investigate with his flashlight, he found a low-slung foreign sports car, run in off the little road but not quite concealed.

The glove compartment contained a book of instructions, a few packages of cigarettes, a bottle opener. He picked up from the seat and examined a small cardboard box, which was empty. On the lid there were three Oriental-looking symbols in a vertical line; they meant nothing to him. He was about to replace the box when it occurred to him to smell it. The odor was distinct: the smell of gunpowder. And then he remembered the odd-shaped automatic on the bureau in Chuck Wright's room at his club.

He fixed the license number in his mind and drove swiftly to the restaurant where Tom Winston and the others were waiting.

TIME SEEMED to stand still now for Chuck Wright. He lay on his back, not wishing, even in darkness, to expose his head more often than necessary around the corner of the Hilliard garage. He could not see well enough to know whether either man was keeping watch out the rear windows.

Twenty minutes ago, when he had seen the blue sedan in the driveway, he had known that the two other men were still in the house. Before he dared make any move at all now, he had to know in which rooms they were staying—and he would probably have to wait till morning to find that out.

His idea was to slip in through the rear door, using the key that Cindy had accidentally left in his hand the night before last. Once inside, the small back hall gave him access to the downstairs area of the house; the rear stairway offered a way to the second floor; and the steps leading to the basement provided a place for him to conceal himself if necessary.

That deputy, Webb, had convinced him that Glenn Griffin would not leave the house without taking every precaution for himself; this was the meaning of Mr. Hilliard's letter, too. Very soon now, Chuck guessed, the police would have the name, the address, everything. If they did start to move in, somebody had to be inside that house to see that nothing happened to the Hilliards.

Chuck examined his watch: 4:17. In two hours, the sky would begin to whiten. Then another two hours before Cindy and her father would leave for work. Would they let them leave today?

The thought of the Hilliards in there now moved him strangely. It was the first time in his life that outrage and compassion had made him feel a part of something. He felt involved now, one of them. It came to him at this most unlikely time that he had never really felt a part of his parents' life. He didn't blame them, but he recognized his loss for the first time and began to understand that the fast driving, the foot-loose girls, the rebellion had all been feeble attempts to conceal his aloneness from himself.

Strength grew in him, the solid, knowing determination of a man who knew that he was not going to let anything happen to the people he loved. He was going to see to it that nothing happened to Cindy or to any of these people who, by his own secret and mystifying adoption, had become his family.

BY SIX O'CLOCK Jesse Webb was ready for anything. It had been determined, with Carson, the FBI man, making the decision, that they were not to shoot if Griffin and Robish came out of that house with any member of the Hilliard family. They were to hold fire and wait. The State Police had insisted vehemently that this was stupid because the killers would not let their hostages live anyway. But the decision had been made, and now all precautions had to be taken. Given a chance, the police had to be ready to capture or kill the fugitives.

Jesse mounted a ladder on the east side of the Wallings' house and climbed carefully, in the first light, over the peak of roof



while Tom Winston and Carson explained to the startled people inside what was taking place. From the front corner of the roof he ascertained that a man placed here could command a view of the Hilliard residence, including that length of driveway that lay between the blue sedan and the boulevard. From higher, it might be possible to see more.

An hour later, therefore, one state trooper and one man from Jesse's office, in the coverall uniforms of an established television dealer, were waiting for their signal to appear at the Walling home to set up a television antenna on the roof.

At 7:50, in the attic of the Wallings' home where a police radio apparatus was being assembled, Jesse Webb received word that the license on the small foreign sports car back there in the woods had been issued to Charles K. Wright, Jr. Thinking then of his wife, Kathleen, who was probably waking up at his mother's house, far across town, never really threatened, Jesse understood young Wright, his reluctance to talk and also the impulse that had now brought him back to this area.

Jesse paced the attic, smoking. He hadn't shaved. He felt tired and on edge. It was almost 8:10, and he was still mulling over a report he had received several hours ago from the telephone company. In the two days since the three had escaped, one long-distance telephone call had been received at the Hilliard home. This had been a person-to-person call, collect, to a Mr. James from a Mrs. Dixon. It had been placed from a pay station in Circleville, Ohio—which was twenty-six miles south of Columbus, where Helen Lamar's trail had been lost. Undoubtedly, Helen Lamar had bought a car, traveled south, called Glenn Griffin and made arrangements.

Then, at 3:22 this morning, barely an hour after Hank Griffin was killed, someone at the Hilliard number had placed a person-to-person call to a Mrs. Dixon in Cincinnati, Ohio. Did Glenn Griffin want to make sure that Helen Lamar was carrying through with her part of some scheme? Whatever the answer to that, Jesse Webb now had hopes that the FBI and the Cincinnati police would soon have Helen Lamar under arrest.

He stomped down the attic stairs of the Wallings' house, then down another flight and into the kitchen. Tom Winston pushed in from outside and leaned against the table. "A man and a redheaded girl just left the house, Jess. They're walking toward

the bus stop. The man looks worse than you do—which is saying something. The girl's a beauty and she looks sore at the world."

"Dan Hilliard and Cynthia," put in Mrs. Walling.

"Cocky, aren't they?" said Jesse. "Letting 'em out of that house even now. That leaves the wife and the little boy, huh?"

Chuck Wright also witnessed the departure of Dan and Cindy. *She's not in there now*, he said to himself, with a lifting in his chest. The sight of Cindy's slender figure sent a warmth charging through him. Now, he thought, if you can get both of those guys to the front of the house for half a minute or so . . .

AT THE end of the bus ride downtown, Dan Hilliard alighted from the rear door and held his hand out for Cindy. She stepped down to the sidewalk, then rose up on her toes, and Dan was astonished to feel her lips on his. He was aware that several heads turned, grinning, and he found that, instead of being embarrassed, he was grateful. Grateful and humble and shot clear through with the despair that had been growing in him all night.

Dan bought a paper and walked along the familiar streets in the direction of his office, trying to look at everything with an unemotional eye. As 9:30 and mail time moved slowly closer, he knew that panic was his enemy. The plan he had devised in those sleepless hours last night now seemed a figment of his sickened imagination. The scheme was a form of blackmail, really. In those last frantic minutes after the money was in hand and Glenn Griffin was ready to leave the house, Dan intended to use the idea. *Look, Griffin*, he would say, *you had better take me, and only me, in that car because I'm the one who can set the police on the man you're paying to kill that policeman. Would the grin flicker, fade? I know both the killer's name and the name of the policeman now, Griffin. You let them both slip out last night. And if you take anyone but me on this ride, I'll put the police on the killer, and then all your sticking around here will have been for nothing. What would Griffin do then?*

Dan turned into the department store. The killer-to-be was named Flick, the man to whom Cindy was to deliver three thousand dollars of the money coming in the 9:30 mail. The policeman, whom Griffin was set on murdering in this manner, was named Webb.

But, as he rode up in the elevator, Dan was disturbed by the coolness of his own thinking. In view of the altered facts of the

day, it didn't seem to make good sense. Yesterday, the threat might have forced Glenn Griffin to do as Dan insisted. But today the calm intelligence was gone from the young man. He appeared to be cracking up. His brooding wildness this morning threatened to become more unpredictable than Robish's.

Dan was at his desk now. He was recalling the way Glenn Griffin had snatched the phone from his hands last night—it must have been two o'clock—and the way he had spoken into it: *Hello, hello, who is it?* But there had been no answer and, as Glenn Griffin replaced the phone, Dan had realized fully that he was, from that point on, dealing with a very different young man.

There was also that other telephone call last night, placed by Glenn Griffin to someone in Cincinnati. After the conversation Glenn had shouted from the hall to the den: *Hey, Robish! She's still there. She's waiting. There's someone won't let a man down.*

Twenty-one minutes after nine.

Dan's eyes fell on the morning paper in the pocket of his topcoat. He reached for it, flipped it open and looked directly into the face of young Hank Griffin. Over the photograph were the words:

FUGITIVE KILLED: TROOPER WOUNDED IN GUN BATTLE

There was a knock on the door; then Dan Hilliard's secretary said, "Letter for you, Mr. Hilliard. Special Delivery." She broke off, frowning. "Mr. Hilliard, if you ask me, you're catching the flu. Why don't you go home to bed?"

"I'll be leaving for a while," Dan said, accepting the envelope, which was surprisingly light in weight. "After I've taken care of some business at the bank, I'm going home."

The door closed gently and Dan remembered one more fact about Glenn Griffin, one that explained the others: he had spent much of the night with his ear close to the radio. Glenn Griffin knew what had happened to his brother. And it was this knowledge that had turned him into the hysterical stranger who was beyond reason.

Dan slit open the envelope and counted five one-thousand-dollar bills and one five-hundred-dollar bill.

He slid three of the one-thousand-dollar bills into a plain white envelope from his drawer, carefully placed both envelopes in his breast pocket.

ELEANOR was upstairs with Ralphie, at 9:30, acutely aware of the time. While she played rummy with the boy, she could hear what was said below. There was the steady hum of the radio, and then Glenn Griffin's voice: "Robish. Stick to the window but listen. There's a couple of guys up on the roof of the house next door. They're working on one of those television things."

"Then what you crying about?"

"Who's crying? You just can't tell, that's all. You had more sense, you'd know that."

"Me, I got more sense'n you think, Griffin," Robish replied from the distance. "No gun, but a lot of brains."

"That supposed to mean something?"

"Means," Robish called, "that your kid brother got his last night 'cause he got scared, that's all. You been gettin' jumpier ever since."

Above, Eleanor sensed that, in this brief and broken exchange, she had heard the command shift from Glenn Griffin to Robish. It was the Griffin boy who was nervous this morning, Robish who remained calm and sure of himself.

DAN HILLIARD, at this point, was handing Cindy an envelope containing three thousand dollars. They were in the corridor of the building in which she worked.

"Careful now," he said quietly, his eyes holding hers.

Then he walked down the stairs, and at ten minutes to ten he entered his bank. He carried an empty brief case. He spoke to a teller who had served him for ten years.

The teller complied without question, and Mr. Hilliard left the bank with his brief case bulging with small bills. Three minutes later, a fat deputy from the Sheriff's office asked the teller, through the grilled window, to put those large bills aside until he received further instructions.

LESS THAN five minutes later, Tom Winston was speaking by radio from his office to an FBI agent, not Carson but a new man who had appeared this morning, in the cold attic of the Wallings' residence. This agent, whose name was Merck, went downstairs and outside and motioned to Deputy Sheriff Jesse Webb from the lawn.

Jesse was on the topmost rung of a high ladder placed against

the front of the structure and in clear view of the windows in the Hilliard house; the ladder was much taller than the highest peak of the Wallings' roof, and Jesse, wearing a yellow coverall with printing across the back, seemed to be measuring the upright antenna and giving instructions to two assistants who stood off to one side.

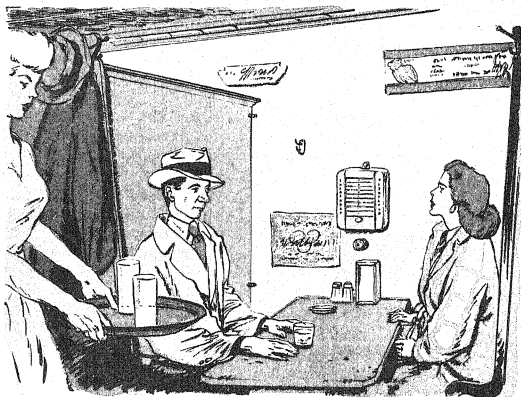
Actually, Jesse was studying the Hilliard house and garage—he could see it all from this vantage point—and in this way was working off some of the tension that was eating in him steadily. He was thinking, too, of the long-range rifles with telescopic sights and of the binoculars that must be kept out of sight.

He descended the ladder and walked into the side door of the Wallings' house with the man Merck, nodding as he listened. In the side hall he tore off the coverall and reached for his trench coat, aware of the eyes upon him from the dining room where three troopers and Carson sat in a huddle. But what Jesse Webb was considering was not the information just received—although the money angle explained why the two men were staying in the house—but a movement he had seen behind the Hilliard garage while he stood on that ladder. He hadn't dared use the binoculars then, but he had his own idea as to what that movement was. And he was not sure there was anything he could do about it.

SHORTLY after 8:30 Chuck Wright had become aware of the activity atop the Wallings' house—long before Glenn Griffin had noticed it. Chuck knew that it was very likely that the police had found out and were setting up a way to attack. It wouldn't take that Webb long, he admitted grudgingly.

Now, at six minutes after ten, stiff with waiting, he was bristling with impatience. He had been hoping that, if one of the two men in the house spotted the activity on that roof beyond the trees, the man who was at the rear window would go to the front of the house to investigate. This had not happened. Chuck Wright decided that he would have to create a diversion that would leave the rear of the house unguarded for the space of time it would take him to get into the back hall.

He was prodded, too, by the certainty that Cindy would return to the house. Perhaps that's what they were waiting for in there. If so, and if those police were planning to close in, Chuck



intended to be inside, with his gun. He left behind all hesitation and doubt.

But where was Cindy now? And what was she doing?

It was a long, narrow room with a bar along one side, booths along the other. There was a raw-whiskey smell about it that added to Cindy's sickening apprehension. She crossed to sit in the first booth, to sit very straight there with her hands on the table, her eyes fixed. Presently a waitress appeared at her elbow, and Cindy ordered an Old Fashioned, the thought of it stirring the nausea in her. She looked at her wrist watch. 10:29.

She could only think of the man who was to meet her here at 10:30. She knew what the man wanted; in a sense, she was committing a murder. Certainly, she was aiding in the crime. But what else could she do?

The anger was still in Cindy Hilliard, and it rose chokingly as she watched the little man who entered now, glanced carelessly around, his dim and very pale eyes sliding over her. Cindy knew

that she could not control the contempt and disgust in her glare, but the little man who approached frightened her. "Mind if I sit down, miss?" he asked.

Cindy felt her head shaking, inviting him to do what he did next: slide into the space opposite her, across the table.

"You know my name, miss?" he asked.

Again she shook her head. She did not know it, or want to know it. She wanted to get away from him, to get back to her father's office, to get into the taxi with him and return to the house, as they had been told to do. She couldn't quite believe, though, that this innocuous-looking man could be a paid killer. He looked and spoke more like a salesman or a bill collector.

He pointed to her glass. "You're not going to drink that?"

"No."

"Thanks, miss."

He drank delicately, almost smiling, but his depthless, pale-blue eyes remained on her. "I'm a messenger," the man said then. "You have something for me to deliver?"

She knew that he was lying, that those same hands now resting flatly and without nerves on the table would pull the trigger, killing another man. She opened her purse, drew out the white envelope. The man took it, nodding, placed it in his pocket without so much as glancing into it.

Then an enormous shadow fell across the table, and she looked up. She saw the man across from her glance up, saw those unnaturally faded eyes meet those of the big man standing there.

"What you got in your pocket, Flick?" the big man asked. "What'd the lady give you?"

"A letter, Sergeant," the one named Flick replied.

"Come along to the station," the detective said. "And you can hand over the envelope, Flick."

The astonishment in Cindy broke then, and rage took over. *This can't be. They can't do this! They're ruining everything now!* She stood up. "You can't—" she began.

The big man only looked at her out of very dark but not unfriendly eyes. "I'm only following orders, miss. If you've done nothing, they won't hold you long."

"Am I under arrest?" Cindy asked.

"Not unless you refuse to come to the station like a nice girl."

Tears came to Cindy Hilliard, real tears for the first time since

it had begun. It was over now for her. But what would happen to the others?

BY NOW Dan Hilliard was back in his office, waiting for Cindy.

When the door opened, he stood at once, knowing it was his daughter, that it could be no one else. But the man who entered was very tall, with bloodshot eyes and a slow but definite manner as he crossed to stand in front of Dan. The man flipped back his coat and Dan caught a quick glimpse of badge, of leather holster, of gun butt.

Very slowly then, Dan sank back.

"Morning, Mr. Hilliard," the man said. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Webb. I received your letter."

Dan threw back his head, stunned, thinking: This is the very thing you've fought against. It can't go like this now, now with the money in your pocket. "I don't know what you're talking about, Deputy."

It appeared then that Jesse Webb lost his temper. He pulled his hands out of his pockets and rested on them, with the palms flat against the top of Dan Hilliard's desk, the lean body hunched forward.

"Look," he said in a hoarse, cracked voice. "Look, Mr. Hilliard, I wouldn't be here if I didn't have it, hear? It's taken a long time. I started from scratch, but I'm here, and we don't have time to waste, do we, Mr. Hilliard? So let's have the rest of it now, straight, from the beginning. Then we can decide what we're going to do about it."

IT WAS going on eleven o'clock! You can't wait all day for something to happen, Chuck. He was crouched now behind the shrubbery at the corner of the garage, concentrating on the head that appeared, was gone, then inevitably reappeared behind the transparent curtain in Mr. Hilliard's den.

You've got to create your own diversion, he told himself.

He had selected and then rejected various methods before he finally hit upon a way that could be explained, perhaps by Mrs. Hilliard inside, as a perfectly natural occurrence. After all, dead branches often dropped onto roofs.

He picked up a two-foot length of dead bough, drew back his arm and let go. The branch looped up over the roof, cleared the

top by inches and dropped out of sight. Then Chuck waited, listening. The sound came—first a thud, then a scudding as the broken bough tumbled and bounced down the far pitch of roof. Chuck's eyes were on the window. The transparent curtains flew back; he saw a square block of unshaven face appear, the eyes darting about. Then the curtains swished down and the head disappeared completely.

It was his chance. He had to take it, knowing as he ran that a bullet might stop him. He reached the porch, slipped the key into the lock. Deep in the house, he heard two men's voices, then a woman's. He edged the door open. There was a small sharp crack of sound. He closed it behind him.

The back hall was dim, very small. He was beginning to breathe heavily now, as he heard footsteps coming to the rear. Chuck, moving very slowly in the semidarkness of the basement stairs, crept down one step at a time.

Above, from the direction of Mr. Hilliard's den, the heavy steps halted and a deep voice said, "All clear here, Griffin."

Farther away, a lighter one called, "Okay. We take the woman's word for it. This time."

Chuck rested against the musty-smelling wall, trying to quiet his breathing. The Japanese automatic had already begun to feel natural in his right hand.

CHAPTER 7

DAN HILLIARD gave Jesse Webb the facts in five minutes. Webb interrupted only once, to question Dan closely about his daughter, Cynthia, and exactly where she had gone.

At the end of his explanation, Dan said, "Flick is going to kill you, Deputy, for the three thousand dollars my daughter's giving him now."

"So that's the way he was doing it," Jesse said, rubbing a hand over his shadowed, unshaven face.

"We had no choice, Webb."

"Who said you did?" The deputy sounded angry. "We'll take care of Flick. Mr. Hilliard. If your daughter went to him, he'll be picked up. There's a city detective following her right now."

Dan stood up, his knees caving. "You fool," he cried. "You idiot!"

"All right, all right, Hilliard. Take a swing at me. How did I know? I was trying to protect your girl."

Dan Hilliard looked ashamed of the violence. "I've been waiting for her, that's all. It's late. Those fellows are going to get anxious, Webb. You know what that means." He was climbing into his coat. "I have to get back up there now. Without her, I suppose." He pulled his hat down, low and hard.

"She'll be all right, Hilliard. I swear she'll—"

"Swear," Dan said in a low ironic whisper. "What can you swear to? That they won't somehow get word that their man Flick has been picked up? That they won't jump to the idea that I caused that? Or Cindy? Can you swear they won't shoot my wife or my son, thinking I double-crossed them? Swear! What can you swear to?"

"To this, Hilliard. That if there's one less Hilliard in that house, there's one less innocent person might be killed in the next hour!"

Dan moved to the door. "Thanks, Webb. I'm sorry I blew up."

Jesse Webb cleared his throat. "If there's any way to get them to come out alone, of course, on the run—" But he broke off. "You want a lift?" he asked briskly.

"I'm supposed to take a taxi."

"Oh." Then: "How about a gun?"

Dan gave his head a negative twist.

"Good luck, Mr. Hilliard," Jesse Webb said.

And then, after a pause, Dan said, "I've changed my mind. About the gun."

"You want one?"

"Yes."

Jesse Webb handed over the .38 from his shoulder holster. The gun was heavy in Dan Hilliard's grasp. He fumbled with it a moment, finally breaking the gun; he shook the steel-jacketed bullets into his big palm.

"Are you crazy, Hilliard?" Jesse Webb demanded.

"Possibly. Only a crazy man'd go into that house with an empty gun, wouldn't he? Griffin doesn't think I'm crazy. That's a very, very long shot, but I don't have any short ones in sight. Do you?"

Jesse Webb shook his head and, as Dan Hilliard crossed to the

door, the deputy said, "One more thing. A young fellow named Wright, Charles K. Wright—"

"Yes?"

"I can't be sure, but there's a strong chance that he's hiding near your house somewhere."

"Good Lord," Dan Hilliard breathed, stunned.

"As I say, I don't know. I thought I saw movements behind the garage this morning. I just thought maybe you ought to have the whole picture."

"Thanks, Deputy," Dan Hilliard said, with all the weight showing in his heavy shoulders as he disappeared.

"The poor guy," Jesse Webb muttered, but with a kind of reverence that shone in his eyes.

UNDER THE basement stairs, Chuck Wright was trying to make his own decision. When do you go upstairs, Chuck? His watch read 11:30.

By now, he gathered, the young-voiced man toward the front of the house—that would be Glenn Griffin—had expected to receive a telephone call from some man. At any rate, his voice was shaking now in a way that Chuck didn't like at all.

"Didn't that gal give him the dough? What's happening? Robish, what you figure's happening? Why don't he call like he promised?"

"I don't know the guy," Robish replied from the den. "I'd a-done it for you, Griffin. Give me a gun."

Why did the man refer to a gun in that way? Did it mean that there was only one gun up there?

Take it easy now, Chuck told himself. You can handle them both if they have only one gun, but you can't be sure what would happen to Mrs. Hilliard or the little boy if you tried it.

All at once, he heard Glenn Griffin again. "*Where's Hilliard? Why ain't he back here?*" Chuck realized from Griffin's desperate tone of voice that he had better wait no longer.

In the back hall, he heard, beyond the door leading into the den, the older man moving about. Chuck kept his gun on that door while he backed slowly up the rear stairway, one step at a time. In this way he moved until he felt safe to turn and continue up.

The upstairs portion of the house was not familiar to him. He

crept down the hall, a floor board squeaking occasionally. He came to the open door of the front bedroom, across the hall and stair well from the one in which he judged Mrs. Hilliard was staying with the boy.

He backed into the bedroom, recognizing it as Cindy's. With the gun held in front of him, he used his other arm to search behind him. His hand found a door, then a knob. He edged the door open very slowly and stepped back into the closet. Even when he was inside the closet, he kept his eyes and the gun on the hall door.

He had not been there for more than ten minutes when he heard that frightening voice from below: "Here they come, Robish. There's a taxi stopping out front."

FROM THE top of the Wallings' home, Jesse Webb had seen the taxi approaching from some distance. He wore again the yellow coverall. He was conscious, with his stomach twisting, of the men deployed on the edge of the woods below, of the patrol cars down the street in both directions. When he spotted the taxi, Jesse glanced to make sure that the rifle was within reach. He called down and could feel the alertness come into the others.

Dan Hilliard stood with his back to the house, paying the driver. Then, with no hesitation whatever, he walked toward his own side door and disappeared.

The longing to know what was happening in that house at this moment made Jesse grip the rungs of the ladder. What were they doing? The girl wasn't with Hilliard. He had the money, but he also had that empty gun. *What was going on in there?*

"*Here they come, Robish. There's a taxi stopping out front.*" Chuck Wright wondered then if he had waited too long. He heard Mrs. Hilliard's mumbled instructions to Ralphie; then he heard that bedroom door open and close and the lock turn. Chuck stepped to the hall door, listening to the swift, muffled flutter of Mrs. Hilliard's footsteps descending the stairs.

They, Griffin had said. That would be Hilliard and Cindy. Cindy, too. He stepped, with extreme caution, to the banister.

Down below, the high-pitched voice: "Where's the redhead, Hilliard?"

Struck with disbelief, Chuck took a breath, held it. He couldn't

hear Mr. Hilliard's low-voiced reply. It didn't seem possible, but Cindy was not in the house. Chuck tried to dry his palms on his trouser legs and then took a firmer grasp on the automatic.

"He's lying," Robish said. "It's a trick."

"The dough's all here," Griffin announced. "Too late for tricks now, Pop." And some of the lighthearted excitement returned to his tone. "I don't like the way you're staring at me. Lay off, see. Put your hands up. *Up!* Let's see what you're carrying."

Chuck Wright, straining, listened. Not yet, he told himself.

DAN HILLIARD felt Glenn Griffin's gun probing cruelly along his sore ribs while the other hand went through his pockets. He didn't flinch when, with a gleam of rage in his anxious eyes, Griffin stood back, the deputy's .38 in his hand.

"You rat," Glenn Griffin said then, and the tone made Dan Hilliard wince inside with an ironic satisfaction. In his astonishment and anger, Griffin was not examining the gun.

Dan saw the gun going up then, swinging high and sideways; he heard Eleanor's stifled shriek at his side; then he felt the muzzle across his cheekbone. A tooth began to throb. He could feel the muscles of his face leaping.

"Say something!" Glenn Griffin shouted. "Don't just stand there! What'd you expect to do with this thing?"

Still Dan didn't answer; he felt the blood along the cheek, and he felt Eleanor against him.

"Give me that," Robish said, stepping in, "and let's blow. You got the dough. What're we waiting for?"

But the gun Robish wrenched from Glenn's hand was not the one Dan had brought into the house. Robish held the loaded gun.

"Griffin, snap out of it!" Robish bellowed. "We gotta move!"

IN THE hallway above, having heard the ugly smash of metal against human flesh, Chuck Wright had to grip the banister to keep himself from plunging down the stairs. The gun's on Mr. Hilliard; you can't move.

At the same time he felt caught in the grip of his own helplessness. No matter what he did, one of those guns—for there were two now—would be turned on one of the Hilliards.

"Get the kid," Griffin said. "Hilliard, the kid and your old lady are going for a ride. Any objections?"

"Yes," Mr. Hilliard said, and Glenn Griffin laughed shortly. But he listened, too, as Mr. Hilliard explained why, in a low murmur, which Chuck Wright could not make out. Then Mr. Hilliard's voice rose a notch: "If you don't want that hired killer nabbed, you'd better take me. Only me."

"Listen who's telling us what," Robish snarled.

"Wait a minute, Robish," Griffin said. "Maybe—"

"Nothing doing! What do I care what happens to your cop? It's my skin now. We're wasting time. Those woods out there might be full of Feds for all we know. I'm moving. The kid and the woman!"

Chuck Wright realized then that Robish was lumbering toward the stairway. He wheeled, stepping into Cindy's room, across the hall from the locked door. He brought the Japanese automatic up and stood flattened against the inside wall of the room.

Now? Now, when his back's to you and he's trying the door? One of them now, and fast, and take your chances with the one downstairs?

But they're not your chances, Chuck. They're Mr. Hilliard's. And his wife's. The helplessness was a dead weight in him. He heard Robish's low mutter of rage and then, behind it, in the bedroom, the faint but definite voice of the child crying.

Then Robish stopped. Chuck took one chance. He eased his head around the doorframe, took a look at the enormous body facing the closed door with indecision.

What are you waiting for? All you have to do is tighten your finger, pull that trigger, but be careful now to aim high because of the boy beyond. What are you waiting for, Chuck?

He heard from below a few more words: "Thought we could make a deal, did you, Pop? You're getting pretty brave, ain't you?" Then the tone dropped, changed: "Maybe you better tell me what's happened to Flick then, Pop. Why he didn't call me this morning. You better tell me now, Pop, 'cause pretty soon you're not going to be talking, see?"

Chuck Wright was not prepared for what happened then. He watched Robish step back, the shoulders still heaving, and he saw him lift his foot.

Although the jolt of the kick shook the whole frame of the man, the lock held, the hinges held. Behind the door, the boy's sobs stuttered off into whimpers. Spitting an oath then, Robish

stepped back and kicked again. This time the wood cracked like the report of a rifle. The violence of the sound seemed to stir the big man, and then he was kicking again and again, a low laugh exploding deep within him, and the wood splintered and shredded and broke with deafening reverberations through the house.

"Robish!" Griffin shouted from below. "Robish, you fool! No noise! No racket!"

The last words were spoken as Glenn Griffin himself tore up the stairs. He appeared before Chuck Wright could draw himself back, but Griffin did not see him because he kept screeching at Robish in that high-pitched and terrible voice. "You want the whole neighborhood down on us? No noise, you dumb slob!"

Now Chuck was safe behind the doorframe. But he couldn't wait. The men, both of them, were upstairs. It was the break he'd been hoping for and, now that it had come, he wasted no time whatever. He thought, as he shoved his head around the door, that he heard the front door open and close. The incredibility of it held him rigid there a moment before he fired.

It may have been that split second of time that defeated him. He saw Glenn Griffin's gun coming up at him, and he swung his own gun to the right and fired, expecting to hear the explosion from Griffin's gun but feeling only the jolt along his own arm. He saw Glenn Griffin dropping down on the stairs. Then Chuck saw the spurt from Robish's hand, saw it even in the sunlight, and he fired once again himself, at the big man, knowing that he had missed this time. The reason came to him then as he heard his own gun clattering to the floor and felt, with surprise, the impact of the bullet against his chest. As yet, even when the first wave of blackness broke over him, there was no pain.

Then, slumped down inside the room, wondering a little at the wetness around his chest, he heard—from an echoing distance—what he took to be footsteps descending the stairs.

Then the burning came, and the black wave broke over him and carried him down.

ROBISH plunged down the stairs, tripping over Glenn Griffin but not falling, muttering fiercely. Dan Hilliard waited, knowing that his impulse of a few seconds before had saved Eleanor but that Robish would kill him and that Ralphie was still upstairs.

When Glenn Griffin had rushed up the stairs, Dan Hilliard had seen his chance, and he had unlocked and opened the front door; without a word, he had pushed Eleanor through it. She was no sooner outside than the three shots exploded above, and she had paused instinctively, breathing one word: "Ralphie." Dan had shouted at her in the echoing thunder: "It's not Ralphie, it's not Ralphie! *Run!*"

The very savagery of his reassurance had sent her running but, when Dan himself had closed the door and started toward the stairs, he had been sure that one of those shots had killed his son. The sight of Glenn Griffin slumping slowly down on the stairs above had stopped him, held him in the hall; he expected to see the figure slide down the steps, but instead it was Robish who stepped over the fallen man and came lunging down like a great maddened bear.

Finally, he made out a few of the words that Robish muttered to him: "... Wise guy ... got the cops ... double cross ... rat ..."

Dan listened, not understanding the words. What had the police to do with what had happened up there?

Then he heard a voice, from above, a tentative but uninjured voice: "Dad? Dad?"

"Stay there, Ralphie," Dan called. "It's all right!"

"All right," Robish echoed hollowly. "You sneaked a copper in—" The words seemed to give him impetus; Dan saw the idea seep upward in the man, finally reach those opaque eyes. Robish charged to the front door, flung it open heedlessly, driven by fear and rage.

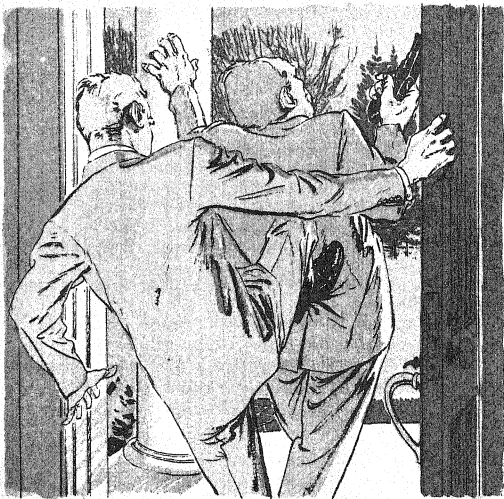
"Any more of you out there?" Robish bawled into the cold air. "I got one of you upstairs! Who wants it next?"

Seeing the man in the half-open door, senseless in the grip of his own terror, Dan Hilliard edged closer.

Robish bellowed: "I still got Hilliard and the kid! They're alive!"

Those words roused in Dan a savage fury. He was very close to the man's back.

In one sudden movement then, he grabbed the door, whipped it wide open, lifted his foot and plunged it into the man's spine. All the coiled rage in him drove his leg, and it sent the hulk of body across the porch—a few spraddle-legged steps at first, then a headlong plunge off the steps onto the grass.



Robish rolled as he struck the ground, lifting the gun. The explosion thundered up and down the street, but the bullet dug into the solid wood of the closed door that Dan Hilliard had snapped shut and locked.

Dan turned then from the door and started up the stairs. Halfway up he stopped, stunned.

Glenn Griffin no longer lay on the stairway.

WHEN Jesse Webb saw a woman emerge from the front door of the Hilliard house, he stiffened, lifting his hand automatically to give the signal that the men below had been expecting. But the woman was alone, hesitating on the porch a moment, and

Jesse did not bring his hand down in the prearranged signal. There was that moment of suspense and then three shots rumbled in rapid succession, muffled in the Hilliard house but clearly discernible even at that distance. He saw the woman turn from the house then and begin to run toward the safety of the trees.

After a few seconds that seemed an eternity to Jesse Webb, a hollow shout from the direction of the Hilliard front door galvanized him. Jesse couldn't make out the words. Then a brawny man with a huge head came charging out the Hilliards' front door as though propelled from behind. He fell twisting onto the grass, and Jesse Webb reached for the rifle. In the second he turned, he heard another shot, and he saw the black glitter in the man's hand as he lumbered toward the blue sedan.

Jesse Webb clamped his lean jaws together. Whatever the shooting inside the house had meant, there was still the chance that Griffin was still alive. What would happen to Hilliard and the boy if Griffin were startled now, if he realized the police were outside, if he had that other gun . . . ? But the other gun was empty. Robish had fired. The gun in the house, then, was Jesse Webb's own .38 and Hilliard himself had taken the bullets from it.

"Tom," Jesse Webb said, the rifle still along his arm, "hold fire. Robish is leaving in the Hilliard car. He's armed. Get him three or four blocks from the house. No closer. But get him."

There was no way out for Robish now. They had him.

What held Jesse Webb, what kept him from giving the signal to close in, was the one other unknown element: what had become of Charles Wright and that funny automatic of his? It was Jesse Webb's hunch that that gun was also in the Hilliard house.

If Hilliard wanted him, he would call—if he was still alive.

Jesse looked down for a moment to see Carson leading Mrs. Hilliard from the woods into the Wallings' house. She was not crying. Jesse Webb had already begun to suspect that it was Dan Hilliard who had pushed the woman from the house. What that meant, he didn't know. But he decided, arbitrarily, to give Hilliard another five minutes. He would wait at least until Carson had Mrs. Hilliard's report of what was happening in there.

DAN HILLIARD mounted the stairs, his tread heavy and determined, hearing the motor of his car grinding over outside. As he reached the head of the stairway, where Glenn Griffin had

been lying a few moments before, he saw a streak of blood on the carpet. He paused.

But only briefly because, while he heard Griffin's voice on his right, behind the smashed door—"In here, Hilliard"—he saw something in the door of Cindy's room that drew him there instead. He looked down into the gray face of Chuck Wright. His whirling mind took in the dark stain on the floor, the lifeless-looking body, the odd-shaped gun. In one fluid movement, Dan Hilliard picked up the automatic and turned to cross the hall.

He knew what he was going to do now. Before the police came in, before anything else, he was going to empty this gun into Glenn Griffin. But the thought of Ralphie in that room made Dan slip the gun into his coat pocket, with his hand closed over it.

He stepped into the room. Ralphie was on the bed, huddled in one corner, and behind him stood Glenn Griffin, his dark, unnaturally bright eyes fixed glassily on Dan. But Dan was looking at the icy-white and frozen terror on the face of his son.

It would not be so easy. The boy's eyes returned in sickened fascination to the gun that Glenn Griffin kept fixed on him. The gun was empty, but still it was not going to be so simple.

"Get me out of here, Pop," Griffin said. The insolence was gone. "That copper nicked me. You got more of 'em outside?"

Dan saw the blood-edged furrow along the side of Glenn Griffin's scalp, and he realized that Chuck Wright's first shot had stunned but not seriously wounded the convict.

"Ralphie," Dan said quietly. "Ralphie, look at me. Listen."

"No time now, no time!" Glenn Griffin cried, licking his lips, and he moved the gun closer to the boy's head.

Dan Hilliard became aware of something else then, and worked around it. He couldn't startle Griffin into bringing that gun down on the boy's skull.

"Son," Dan said slowly, very low and definite, "listen to me. Nothing's going to happen to you. That man is not going to shoot you. Do you hear me?" Ralphie nodded, but uncertainty appeared in his eyes. Dan's heart twisted. "He's not going to shoot you, Ralphie, because—"

"Lay off, Hilliard! You don't lay off, I'll get it over with. You got to get me out of here, see!" The frantic note was clear.

Dan ignored him, concentrating on his son. "Ralphie, that man's gun is not loaded."

He was studying his son's face. "Do you believe me?"

Then, very slowly, the boy nodded his head.

"What's going on here?" Griffin shrilled. "Hilliard, you deaf?"

Dan said, as slowly as before: "Ralph, I want you to do whatever I say now."

"Stop the talk!" Griffin yelled. "My head hurts. I got to—" He broke off, and somewhere in his reeling mind a suspicion took root. "You wouldn't a-come in here with a empty—"

That moment of self-doubt was what Dan had been playing for. "Ralphie!" he barked suddenly. "Run!"

The shout brought the boy up off the bed in one bound before Griffin could move.

"Get downstairs and outside!" Dan Hilliard shouted.

And then he saw Glenn Griffin lifting the gun, swinging it after the boy. Dan had to break his first impulse with a great effort of will. He kept the automatic in his pocket even when he heard the empty gun clicking. He heard Ralphie on the stairs, skittering down. The boy was gone.

Dan watched the dazed horror in the face across the room; he saw the white teeth bared; he heard the faint boylike cry in the back of the young man's throat as he brought the deputy sheriff's gun up to point directly at Dan Hilliard. Dan heard the clicks, over and over. It was then that he brought the automatic from his coat pocket.

Whatever Glenn Griffin saw on Dan Hilliard's face then—the pitiless eyes, the set of jaw—whatever it was, it caused him to back into the corner, his tongue darting wetly from between his lips. His eyes dropped, but they appeared not to see, not quite to comprehend the meaning of that gun in the white-knuckled hand that moved closer.

Glenn Griffin was sliding down against the wall. His mouth opened and closed and opened again, working loosely, but no sound came. He pleaded with fluttering hands.

The grotesque pantomime sickened Dan Hilliard. He lowered the gun slowly. He didn't have the right to kill this—this scum.

"Get out," he said softly. He felt dirty all over, as though some of the slime had wiped off on him somehow. "Get out of my house," he said, but still quietly.

Then he heard the scrabbling, as Glenn Griffin, whimpering, clawed his way across the bed, staggered toward the hall; Dan

heard the quick drum of steps on the stairway and the opening of the front door. Dan tossed the automatic to the floor. He had almost murdered a man.

He threw open the window. "Webb!" he shouted. "Get a doctor and ambulance, fast!" Then he whirled about and strode swiftly toward his daughter's bedroom where Chuck Wright lay unconscious. Dan was bending down when he heard two shots outside.

JESSE WEBB lowered the rifle. The slender, dancerlike figure on the Hilliard lawn lay quite still now.

Two minutes before, Jesse had received the report that Robish had smashed up the blue sedan and the police had pulled him from the wreckage, badly injured, but alive. Alive until after the trial, Jesse thought grimly. It's all over.

But he was remembering, as he climbed slowly down the ladder, the way he had lifted the rifle when he saw that figure emerge from the Hilliard house. Griffin had been running at full tilt, arms raised, hands working convulsively, the mouth shouting indistinguishable words. Had those words been a plea for mercy? Did Jesse remember then that other time when, after using a gun himself, Griffin had thrown it to the pavement and demanded the privilege of giving himself up? Or was Jesse concentrating only on fixing the man dead center in the crossbars of the rifle sight? He had fired, feeling only the recoil of the rifle, seeing the figure stop, twist, sink to one knee on the grass, remain balanced there until the second bullet reached him.

He made his way into the Wallings' house, hearing the siren wails in the distance, and sank into a deep chair alongside the telephone. He could already hear the soft note of relief in Kathleen's voice. And he could imagine, too, the grim, curt satisfaction in Uncle Frank's voice when he phoned him later.

But Jesse Webb did not share the satisfaction. Another feeling, almost disgust, was in him, and strong. Not because he'd killed a man; he no longer looked upon Glenn Griffin as a man in that sense. The feeling was in him because life should not be so. And then, as he picked up the phone, he was glad for the feeling. It set him apart from men like Griffin and Robish, who also killed. He still clung to a hope that someday it would not be necessary to settle matters in this manner. Until then, he had a job and, in the last two days, he had done it.

EVERYONE, including Eleanor, had insisted that Dan stay home. Cindy was at the hospital with Chuck and there was certainly nothing more Dan could do now. He needed rest and his swollen jaw looked terrible. But here he was in the waiting room and Eleanor was beside him on the wicker couch.

Jesse Webb came in, removed his hat, and stood there, a trifle awkward. "The kid'll be out of here in two weeks," he drawled. "Your daughter's in the room with him, Mr. Hilliard. She just apologized to me about carrying the money to Flick. Not that she could have done anything different. I guess that's all. Now will you go home?"

Dan stood up. "If the boy's conscious, I'd like to see him."

A little crookedly, Jesse was grinning down at Dan Hilliard. "I want to say something."

"Yes?"

"Something about—you ever want a job, sir, just look me up." It was not what he'd intended to say. It didn't even come close, but it was the best Jesse could manage.

Dan Hilliard was smiling, too, and his eyes made Jesse forget the lopsided shape of the face before him. The eyes were blue now, just like the daughter's, but there was a warmth in them, a knowingness, that it might take the girl a lifetime to acquire.

"The same to you," Dan Hilliard said, and he offered the deputy his hand. "You're stealing my thunder, though. That's my work—handing out jobs."

"Room 402, sir," Jesse said, releasing Dan's hand. "And you get some sleep, hear?" He said that last a trifle more gruffly than he'd intended.

He watched Dan Hilliard moving down the corridor. It's a funny thing, Jesse was thinking, how you never seem to say what's in you. He was thinking of a word, and even the word itself sounded odd in his mind. Magnificence. That was the word. You'd never think of applying it to people like Dan Hilliard and his wife. But it applied.

In Room 402 Dan found a young, full-bodied man stretched out flat on a bed with a very white sheet drawn up to his blunt-looking chin. Beyond the man was his daughter, Cindy.

The young man's head turned slowly as Dan entered, and the gray eyes opened wider. Dan stepped to the bed.

"You tell him, Dad," Cindy said. "Wasn't he foolish? I was

nearly crazy in that police station, thinking he might be in the house, too. Tell the man, Dad, so he'll learn not to be such a reckless fool."

Dan fought down a smile. He noticed the bright spots of color high on his daughter's cheeks.

"You were a reckless fool, Chuck," Dan said. "It came in handy."

Chuck Wright looked very pale. "I couldn't do anything else, I guess." His voice was weak.

Dan cleared his throat. "I know the feeling," he said brusquely. He turned to the door. "Don't let her rag you, son. Make her invite you to Thanksgiving dinner. I understand you'll be out of here by then."

Dan Hilliard closed the door behind him, struck again by the radiance that he had caught in his daughter's face. He started down the hall. Had he said what he came all this way to say to Chuck Wright? Probably not. There were things you didn't say, that's all. But there were things you knew, without saying.

He reached his wife; she was alone now. She stood up and took his arm. "You," she said, in that same bullying way of her daughter back there, "you're going to bed now. You're going to sleep for three solid days, Dan. I mean it, too."

They went down in the tiny elevator and then through the stone-and-marble entrance hall of the hospital.

In the sunlight that poured down on the wide steps outside, Ralph Hilliard was surrounded by three men who looked like newspaper reporters to Dan. One carried a camera. Ralph stopped talking when he saw his parents, and he waited for them, very adult for his ten years. Then, out of the corner of his mouth, he said to the three men: "Only if you tell him I said so, I'll sue you for libel."

Dan didn't inquire what his son had told the reporters; Eleanor said nothing. After the picture had been taken and they were in the taxi, she turned her face to Dan, kissed him full on the lips, and held him like that for a long time. Ralph Hilliard, embarrassed, stared out the window.

Joseph Hayes



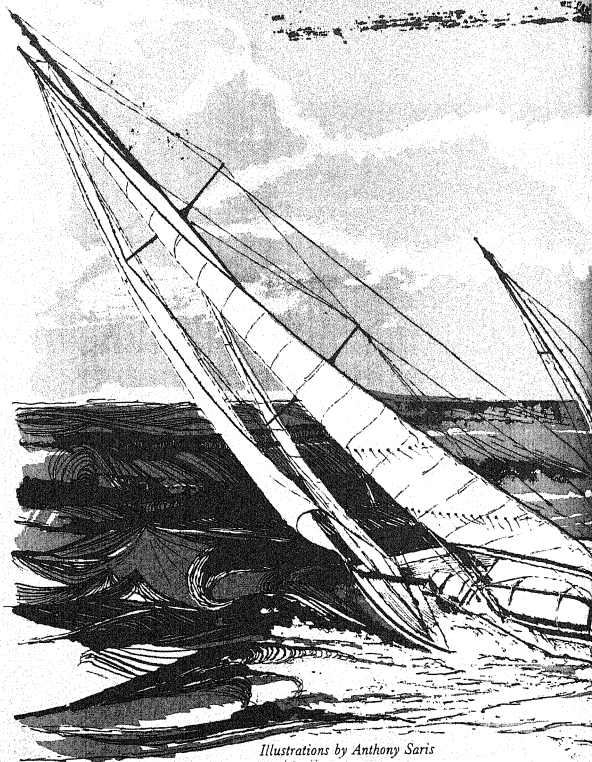
ALTHOUGH *The Desperate Hours* was his first novel, Joseph Hayes had been writing for more than ten years before its publication in 1954. Besides short stories and television scripts, much of this output consisted of plays written in collaboration with his wife, Marrijane, whom he met and married while they were both working their way through the University of Indiana.

The Desperate Hours became a best-seller in book form, and was later adapted by the author into a hit Broadway play and an equally successful motion picture. The book has been published in translation in eighteen foreign countries.

In 1957 the Hayeses collaborated on the novel *Bon Voyage* (Condensed Books, Winter 1957), an amusing story of an American family traveling abroad. This, too, is slated for the screen. Since then Joseph Hayes has again been active on Broadway, and his play *The Midnight Sun* is scheduled for production early in 1960, with a novelized version to follow later.

Joseph and Marrijane Hayes are the parents of three boys, the oldest thirteen, and they divide their time between two homes, one in Connecticut and one near Sarasota, Florida.



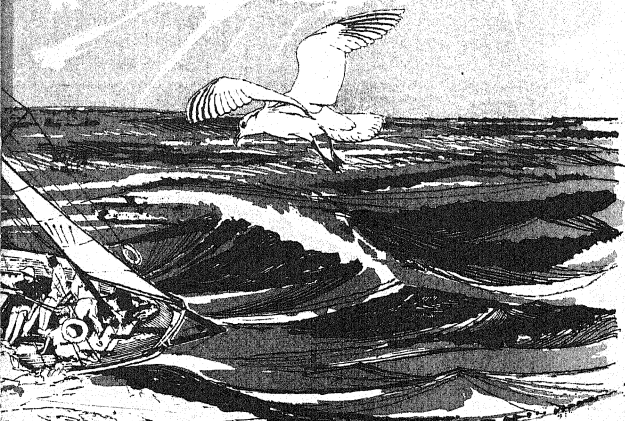


Illustrations by Anthony Saris

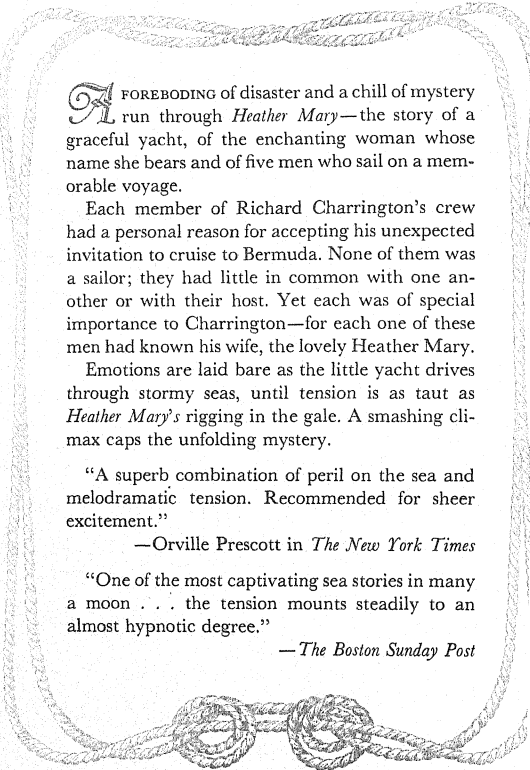
HEATHER MARY

A condensation of the book by

J. M. SCOTT



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A FOREBODING of disaster and a chill of mystery run through *Heather Mary*—the story of a graceful yacht, of the enchanting woman whose name she bears and of five men who sail on a memorable voyage.

Each member of Richard Charrington's crew had a personal reason for accepting his unexpected invitation to cruise to Bermuda. None of them was a sailor; they had little in common with one another or with their host. Yet each was of special importance to Charrington—for each one of these men had known his wife, the lovely Heather Mary.

Emotions are laid bare as the little yacht drives through stormy seas, until tension is as taut as *Heather Mary's* rigging in the gale. A smashing climax caps the unfolding mystery.

"A superb combination of peril on the sea and melodramatic tension. Recommended for sheer excitement."

—Orville Prescott in *The New York Times*

"One of the most captivating sea stories in many a moon . . . the tension mounts steadily to an almost hypnotic degree."

—*The Boston Sunday Post*

CHAPTER 1



At 7:15 a.m. on November 1, 1947, a Seven Continents Airlines Skycruiser left Bermuda for the Azores with twenty passengers and a crew of seven. At 8:20 she sent out a routine position check. The weather was known to be stormy, but since her captain made no mention of this it was taken for granted that the conditions were not dangerous. At 9:15 a.m. she announced that she was switching over to the Azores frequency. That was the last message received from her.

She failed to reach the Azores on schedule. Four hours' spare fuel had been carried, but this margin of time passed without news of her. That meant that she had come down in the Atlantic.

Every available aircraft with the necessary range was mobilized. Every ship in the area was asked to keep a sharp lookout. On the third day of the search a signal was received from the *Morning Pride*, a small freighter on passage between Kingston, Jamaica, and Liverpool. The message gave a position on the outer fringe of the search area, and read: *Picked up 26 survivors presumed of S.C.A. aircraft. Master.*

Public interest, which had begun to die down, flared up like gasoline thrown on embers. Twenty-six survivors meant that one was missing. How had he or she died? Presumably in the crash. And how had the rest survived?

A United States destroyer was ordered to make contact with the *Morning Pride* and take off survivors; and a seaplane chartered by a news agency flew out to get the story. Pending the court of inquiry, the captain and crew of the aircraft refused to make any statement. So the story came from the passengers.

Although the weather had been rough almost from the start

they "seemed to be getting along pretty well." But about two hours after leaving Bermuda they flew into a thunderstorm and "fell into an air pocket deep as a volcano." The aircraft dropped several hundred feet and struck the water. There she was helpless as a butterfly in a river, and the waves began to batter her.

The crew acted promptly and efficiently: they launched and inflated several small floats and two large rubber rafts of ample size to carry everybody on board. To prevent these from being damaged by bumping against the aircraft, they were allowed to drift out to lee while the passengers were pulled out to them on the small floats. In the course of this operation one float broke free with a woman passenger on it. A line was immediately thrown, but she failed to grasp it. Before more could be done the float was swept out of reach and lost sight of among the waves.

After the thrill of the rescue of the twenty-six survivors, interest naturally turned sympathetically to the girl who had been lost. Her name was Mary Brown. She had been a saleswoman in a leading London fashion house, but all her interest and ambition were in the cinema. When her father died, leaving her about £1000, she decided to gamble it all on a visit to Hollywood. Several people had told her that she had a film face, she knew how to wear clothes, and she believed that she would catch the eye of a director and become famous overnight.

This novelette almost worked out as it should—but not quite. She did catch somebody's eye. But after a brief association he gave her not a contract but an air ticket home. So she set off upon her return journey with her little fortune gone, unknown as she had been before. It was cruel irony that now she had passed beyond ambition her name was on everybody's lips and her curious pleasantly ugly face—high cheekbones, wide cat's eyes and big mouth—was pictured in every newspaper.

After two further days the search was abandoned altogether. It was not worth risking other lives by continuing to look for a float scarcely larger than a door mat.

But Mary Brown lived on in people's thoughts. That a girl like the thousands of others who hurry to business every day should risk everything to make her dreams come true, should lose the gamble and meet an end like that, caught the imagination. How long had she remained alive and what had she thought about? Perhaps she had imagined she was acting a scene in a film. . . .

NOWHERE was the story of the crash and its sequel followed with more interest than on the liners which were during that period at sea. I was a passenger on the *Lucullus*, a luxury passenger ship then homeward bound from New Zealand.

We were in the Pacific when the Skycruiser came down in the Atlantic. But many of the passengers realized that our ship would pass through the search area. They wanted to know if the *Lucullus* would join the hunt. The ship's officers pointed out that the area was more than 3000 miles away. The search would be over one way or another before we could hope to join it.

The twenty-six survivors were picked up before we reached Panama. Then we heard the full story. Even in the heat of the canal there was a great deal of discussion about the unfortunate Mary Brown. But this topic did not last for long when the *Lucullus* sailed into the Caribbean. By the time the liner was fairly into the Atlantic the incident of the Skycruiser was as good as forgotten.

On the evening of November 12, those of the passengers who had gone on deck to watch the sunset noticed that the white and green wake of the *Lucullus* was curling to one side. Why were we changing course?

Soon the word was buzzing around. A chartered aircraft flying between Trinidad and Bermuda had reported seeing "a yellow object." Its position was not far off our course. The *Lucullus* had been asked to investigate. We would reach this spot at about eight o'clock next morning. The position was several hundred miles from where the Skycruiser crashed, and the yellow object might be wreckage, but it was taken for granted by most people that it was Mary Brown's float.

At seven o'clock next morning the passengers began to come on deck and take their places at the rail. It was misty in patches, and calm. White clouds, no longer air-borne, lay helpless on the oily water. They moved and wavered slightly, giving occasional glimpses of a longer view—then seemed to close together again as the liner steamed slowly on.

It was infuriating not being able to see properly. And yet—as one lady said—Nature has her sense of the dramatic. The mist was like a theater curtain which might rise at any moment.

At about half past eight a sailor at the masthead, above the ceiling of the mist, gave a shout and pointed to port.

The *Lucullus* stopped her engines and sent off a launch.

Suddenly and briefly through the drifting mist we got a clear view to port. The launch was approaching a tiny yellow thing about a mile away. With binoculars we could make out that it was a float but at that distance could not be certain if there were anybody on it or not. The mist closed again.

For a minute or two we lost even the sound of the launch's engine—presumably it had stopped by the float. Then we heard it again, growing stronger as it approached. By this time the most extraordinary and horrific rumors were circulating among the passengers. But I don't believe that any of us expected what we saw when the launch materialized out of the mist.

Between the sailors in the stern sheets were two figures wrapped to the ears in blankets. There were two of them—not one.

I remember how the jabber of excitement started slowly, uncertainly, then burst into pandemonium. Although neither figure could be recognized as a woman, one must be Mary Brown. And someone—some creature which seemed human—had joined her in the middle of the Atlantic to keep her alive.

I forced my way below, but before I could reach the sick bay the door had been closed and a guard set. The guard would say nothing. I think it was at that moment that I formed the resolution of discovering the whole story—which I shall tell.

CHAPTER 2

AMONG the passengers who got off the train at Brixham in the late afternoon were four men. They were only names to each other, and it was by chance that two of them met. A young man with a close-cropped head and a distinct military bearing was arranging with a porter to take his valise down to the harbor when a short, broad man asked if he could share the barrow.

"Of course, sir."

The square man studied him a moment. "I think you must be Colonel Harding?"

"Yes. Are you—?"

"Boyd."

They shook hands. After that they scarcely spoke until they were following the porter down the street, but Harding's first impression had been favorable. Boyd was about forty-five. His

hair was gray, long and curling except on the crown of his head, which was bald as a monk's. He had a colorless, tired face and intelligent blue eyes.

"You know, Professor," Harding said, "I was darned glad to hear you were coming. This will be a formidable trip and I'm a complete duffer about anything that concerns the sea. . . ."

"So am I. I haven't been in a sailing vessel since I was a boy."

"But you're a physicist, aren't you? You know the theory."

"So does the child who drops a feather into the windward end of a puddle."

"The Atlantic Ocean is a considerable puddle," Harding said, doubtfully. Then he laughed his loud two-syllable laugh, which was like an order to himself to change his mood. "Never mind, Richard Charrington is an expert and no doubt the other two are pretty good. What are their names?"

"Carlyle and Yeoman."

"Know them?"

"We haven't met. Commander Charrington told me of them in his last letter."

"You know Richard pretty well, I suppose."

"He first wrote to me shortly after the war ended about that tragic affair of his wife. Since then we have met I suppose half a dozen times. I very much appreciated his invitation. It happened to fit in perfectly."

Harding would have liked to know why this fellow ten years older than himself and not so fit by the look of him, without yachting experience, and a mere acquaintance of Richard, should have jumped at this peculiar method of going to Bermuda. But he did not feel that he could ask. Instead he said:

"No doubt we'll all know each other well enough before we arrive." He added, "You knew his wife?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"Damned shame. She was the loveliest creature that ever stepped."

There were a few yachts in the basin—some large, some very small. The two men stood by their barrow of luggage, looking at the forest of masts, smelling the odor of the port, while the porter went to inquire about the yacht.

"I wonder which is the *Heather Mary*," Harding said. "I hope that one, she looks steady."

"I've got some very good pills," Boyd said. "The kind they used on D Day."

At that moment the porter returned and told them that *Heather Mary* was in the outer harbor. They must walk round the basin. They were about to move on when a big man in an overcoat and a black hat approached them. He said:

"Excuse me, I didn't mean to eavesdrop but I couldn't help overhearing you mention *Heather Mary*."

"That's all right," Harding said. "You one of the galley slaves?"

"I'm Jack Yeoman."

"Splendid. I'm Marcus Harding. This is Dr. Boyd."

"I'm sure I'm very pleased to meet you."

"Lucky we have run into you," Harding said when Yeoman's luggage was on the barrow. "The Doctor and I wouldn't have been able to recognize the yacht. You know a lot about boats?"

"I've always been interested in them."

"You know what ropes to pull to make the boat go where you want?"

"I hope so."

"I'm sure you do. And no doubt this other young fellow does, too—Carlyle, I mean."

They walked on, talking.

"There she is! I've seen her photo. That's *Heather Mary*." The yacht toward which Yeoman was pointing rode at anchor by herself, away from the gossiping cluster of yachts in the outer harbor. Harding, who knew nothing about yachts, knew at once that she was in some subtle way superior to all the others. *Heather Mary*. His mind went racing off into the past—*Heather Mary* would naturally be superior.

"Presumably the Skipper is aboard since he did not meet us at the station," Yeoman said. "We might hail her."

They did—together: "*Heather Mary*, ahoy!" The "ahoy" went well enough, but none of them made much noise over the name.

The group of yachts in front of them continued to bob and curtsy to each other. Then a figure appeared from the hatch of *Heather Mary*. He stared toward them under a shading hand. Then he waved his arm, hauled up the dinghy, got into it and began to pull toward the shore.

Boyd and Yeoman, who before had seen Richard Charrington

only in town clothes, greeted him now almost as if he were another person. But it was the conventional figure which had been false. This man in a peaked cap, thick reefer jacket and sea boots was genuine and exactly right. He was nearly six feet tall. His thick shoulders were slightly rounded and this had the effect of thrusting his head forward. His nose was aquiline, his mouth firm, his brows heavy and his eyes deep-sunk. His face was vigorously alive and carelessly charming as the sea in sunlight. As he shook hands with each of them his dark eyes glowed with pleasure.

"Where's Toby Carlyle? Wasn't he on your train?" he asked. "But, of course, none of you've met him. He ought to find his way here though, so we'll give him five minutes."

Charrington asked about their journey, asked Marcus Harding about his wife, Meg, and their children; Jack Yeoman about his daughter, Tilly; Boyd about his work—"You've handed everything over. Good. You're going to have a complete rest—plenty of good hard manual labor. You'll be a new man in a week."

He had stowed the luggage in the dinghy. "We're a full load. No point waiting any longer. We'd better go aboard."

The little dinghy had only a couple of inches of freeboard, but two minutes later they came safely alongside *Heather Mary* and scrambled aboard. Charrington took them below at once.

"Closet and oilskin locker," he said, pointing with either hand as he reached the foot of the companionway. "Aft is the skipper's cabin and chartroom." He pushed open double doors in front of him. "The saloon. Marcus, you and Boyd had better doss down here. In the fo'c's'le yonder—we'll call it the forward cabin—there's a couple of hinged cots. It doesn't look much—the chain locker cramps it a bit—but if you're sleeping no one sits on your face at meals. Suit you, Jack? You bed with Toby when he turns up. Well, gentlemen, this is your home for the next hundred days so make the most of it. Get your kit stowed. Most of the lockers are full of food tins but there's some space here and there. I've a few jobs still to do before we are ready for sea—that's why I could not meet you. I'll get them finished, then we'll have some grub."

CHARRINGTON left them to themselves. They were glad of this. They had evidently brought far too much kit and they found difficulty in stowing it away in the space available—to leave

anything lying about in the perfect neatness of the saloon and forward cabin was not to be thought of. But somehow or other they got it out of sight and after half an hour the three of them were sitting on the settees in the saloon waiting for their next cue.

"What's Richard doing?" Marcus Harding asked.

"He's on deck," Boyd answered. "He said he didn't want any help."

"One feels so damned useless doing nothing."

No one spoke for a minute or two. Then Harding laughed. "This reminds me of my first night in an officers' mess."

Boyd raised his eyes and looked at him but did not speak.

"We'll know each other inside out before this trip is done," Harding went on. "But you might as well hear now why I signed on. I've been out of the army a month. I'm at loose ends now."

"Were you tired of being a soldier?" Boyd asked.

"Tired? Good God, of course not!" Harding exclaimed, coloring. Then he laughed and said more quietly, "I've been in the Far East since the last year of the war. When the battalion was ordered home I sent in my papers. A home station seemed pretty flat and I felt my wife deserved a break. She was in the Foreign Office from the start till '45. London all the time—blitz, doodlebugs, V-2's. Then looking after the kids I've hardly seen. She needs a holiday. I don't know what I shall do later—farm or something. But we've taken a house in Bermuda for the winter."

"Charrington is going to stay with you?" Boyd asked.

"Yes, that's the idea."

"You know him well, I suppose."

"Pretty well. My wife has known him for years. Her people live ten miles from Heather's home. When Richard asked me on this trip it seemed to me a lot more worth while than going by liner—I've spent too long on troopships. Meg—my wife—was damned sporting about it." Harding dropped his voice. "Tell the truth, I believe she's been worried about Richard since, since—you do know about his wife?"

"As much as anybody, I believe," Boyd said gravely.

Marcus Harding stared at him for a moment. Then he turned to Yeoman. "You know about Mrs. Charrington? Excuse my asking—I only want to make sure nobody drops a brick."

Yeoman started, embarrassed at being brought into the conversation. "Why, yes. I knew Miss Heather—I mean Mrs. Char-

rington—very well. I can't help calling her Miss Heather because I knew her before she was married, and still more afterward in a way—not really personally, of course, except sometimes in the war, but the Morrisons have always been our clients and when her father died . . . You understand in the war most of the partners were away and there was a good deal in the estate that had to be explained to her. Oh, what a lovely lady she was! And to think—”

Harding stopped him with a gesture, hearing footsteps on the companionway. The narrow double doors of the saloon were thrust open and Charrington came in. He sidled between the table and one of the settees, sat down and began to jab tobacco into his pipe. His hawklike face was excited, as if he had something pleasant to tell them.

“Sorry to leave you alone for so long. I still had a good many jobs to finish. The lists and counterlists one makes on these occasions! But I’ve just ticked off the last item.”

“We’ve been feeling guilty sitting on our backsides and not helping,” Harding said.

“My dear Marcus, you’ll get plenty of opportunities to earn your passage later, I promise you. Much better that you should get to know each other, as I’m sure you’ve been doing.”

He looked round at them with aggressive, smiling eyes. “And now,” he said, “we deserve a tot—I for finishing several months of work and you for trusting yourselves to the result of it.”

He opened a locker and took out glasses and bottles.

“Jack, you’re the senior, what is it to be—rum, gin or sherry?”

“Whatever you can spare best, sir,” Yeoman said.

Charrington stood with a bottle in each hand, his head thrust forward. “We might as well get this clear at once. Somebody has got to be skipper on every craft and I’ll give such orders as are necessary. But you aren’t a pressed crew. You are my guests and I’m your host, Richard or Skipper or anything you like—except sir. What do you want, Jack, rum, gin, sherry?”

“Gin, please—Skipper.” Yeoman was beaming.

“Water?”

“Yes, please, Skipper.”

Charrington went forward into the galley. There was the squeak and sigh of a small pump and he returned with the filled glass.

He held it to the light. "I watered yesterday. Good plan to test the stuff—with spirit in to make it healthy. . . . What's yours, Marcus? Boyd?"

A minute later Harding said, "This fellow Carlyle—what happens if he doesn't turn up?"

"We'd have to wait, blast him. But he'll turn up all right. He's young—that's his trouble." Charrington finished his drink with a movement like an uppercut. "You must excuse me. From tomorrow one of you will be cook, but to-night I intend to set the standard myself."

He went into the galley, closing the forward double doors behind him.

"There's a leader for you," Harding said.

After that remark neither he nor the others spoke much during the next half hour. They sat sipping their drinks and thinking their own thoughts while the purr of a pressure stove came from the galley. Meanwhile the yacht lay peacefully at anchor. She was not still as a house is still. She was alive. She influenced the thoughts of her crew. Tomorrow she would begin her journey. . . . The three men looked about them at the saloon, a room less than three paces by two in extent. The settees which bordered the two sides were the tops of food lockers. The settees themselves became sleeping bunks at night. Everything was designed with an eye to utility and the saving of space. The other compartments had been built on the same principle—the galley, which was the size of a cupboard and through the middle of which the mainmast passed, the fo'c's'le, or forward cabin, which was also the chain locker and



bosun's store, the minute closet, and presumably the Skipper's cabin as well—everything was as small and neat and intricate as a cunningly made toy. And this would be their home for a hundred days and nights.

"How are you getting back, Yeoman—from Bermuda, I mean?" Harding asked suddenly.

"I'm not. I'm emigrating. You see—" Yeoman turned from Harding's frankly puzzled stare toward Boyd's reposeful face "—I've always wanted to live on a coral island."

Boyd nodded, as if he found this the most natural wish in the world.

"Yes, I've dreamed about it since I was a kid," Yeoman went on. "As I grew up I got to realize it wasn't likely, to say the least of it. A coral island for a solicitor's clerk—I ask you! And when I married, well, I sort of filed it. Then my dear wife died. God forgive me, it came up again. But I soon realized my daughter, Tilly, was my responsibility in her place. Then along came Commander Charrington to thank me, he said, for helping his wife in business matters while he was a prisoner. I saw him several times—he was so friendly, and him being a sailor I told him about my old ambition. Then he told me about this trip and offered to take me. Bermuda's a coral island and there are jobs there. As soon as I find one I'm going to send for my girl."

The forward doors opened and a good food smell came in. "Put up the flaps and lay the table," Charrington shouted. "Cloth and cutlery in the port locker, plates and glass to starboard." The narrow double doors closed with a bang.

Glad of something to do, Harding and Yeoman got in each other's way laying the table. Boyd drew up his legs and watched.

Charrington appeared with a couple of plates in each hand.

"*Moules marinières*," he said. "Toby will miss a good dinner if he doesn't hurry."

The sea-blue shells were lying in wine sauce, sprinkled with parsley; and a fragrant steam was rising from them.

The crew had been expecting something heated up out of a tin. They were silent. Charrington said nothing as he put the plates in front of them, but from the light in his eyes he was conscious of the effect he had made.

Suddenly he straightened up, listening. From the quiet night outside came the creak and splash of oars. In a moment

Charrington was on deck. They heard his voice, warm and friendly. "Oh, it's you, Toby. Splendid. Give me that bag."

A minute later he was back in the saloon with a tall, thin, long-haired young man who blinked at the electric light.

"Introductions," Charrington said. "Dr. Boyd, Jack Yeoman, Marcus Harding—Toby Carlyle."

"I have seen you before," Boyd said, shaking hands. "Did you not lunch in the restaurant car of the twelve-fifty from Paddington?"

"Yes," Carlyle answered.

Then he turned, it seemed angrily, to Charrington. "Why didn't you tell me the name of your yacht?"

"Of course I did."

"No."

"Stupid. I'm sorry. Did you have difficulty finding out?"

"None." Toby remained staring at the lamp as if it hypnotized him. "The first water-front character I asked told me her name was *Heather Mary*."

Boyd, leaning back in his corner, had noticed that Toby Carlyle was drunk and that Charrington knew this although he hid it tactfully. That was good of him, but why had he not told the boy the name of the yacht? It was a strange omission for an essentially competent man.

The *moules marinières* were very good indeed. They were followed by a cold roast goose, which Charrington carved swiftly and efficiently. After dinner he brought out two bottles of excellent wine, and thereafter the evening went as it was bound to go, with growing fellowship, brave statements and good stories.

Charrington was the host, bringing out each man, filling their glasses. Meanwhile *Heather Mary* lay peacefully at anchor though moving just enough to show she was alive and ready to take them on an adventure for which their mood was becoming more and more appropriately keyed.

"I don't suppose this trip is going to be anything to you, Richard," Marcus said. "You've been sailing all your life. You're an expert. Old Jack there and I suppose Carlyle come near to you, but Boyd and I know nothing. How are we going to manage when we get out in the middle of it?"

"As well as I've managed since—the war," Charrington said. Everybody was silent, and he went on. "I've been sailing almost

continuously since then—and always alone. I could cross to Bermuda alone. But I want to enjoy this trip in good company.”

“That’s damn good of you,” Harding murmured. “We’re only anxious not to let you down.”

“You won’t let me down—however little you know about sailing. Listen, every special occupation builds a wall of mystery around itself—law, medicine, mending watches, anything you like. As far as small-boat passages are concerned the writer fellows, like Toby here, have set up great ramparts of death and glory and hardship. But it’s as simple as this: a yacht is a physical body—a strong, thoroughbred, highly efficient body. She lacks nothing except a brain. That is provided by her skipper. On a yacht this size he can, if he wants, translate his wishes into action without help. A crew—extra nerves and muscles and interesting bits of character—are a luxury. They need no special knowledge. They merely pull the rope the skipper tells them to pull or steer a certain course, like mechanical aids. Sorry to put it so bluntly but some of you appear worried and I mean to scotch that from the start. What I hope you will get out of this trip is the freedom from responsibility of passengers mixed with the pleasure of knowing you are part of the yacht. As for me, I’ll be able to take things easy and—and I won’t be as lonely as I’ve been before.”

Charrington had spoken briskly until he came to the last phrase. Then he had checked, and ended on a minor key.

His crew were silent, moved with sympathy.

“Now you’d better turn in,” Charrington said, his voice suddenly aggressive. “We sail with the tide at three o’clock and I’ll want all hands on deck.”

He went quickly to his cabin and closed the door.

The four members of the crew remained for some minutes smoking and finishing their wine. Then, before clearing up or undressing, they went on deck.

It was still and clear. The stars were brilliant. Lights twinkled from the harbor and from the houses which rose in layers up the hill. Other people something like themselves were drowsing by firesides or going upstairs to bed. That was another world. Their own world was this lovely vehicle of adventure which lay resting but ready with her head pointing out to sea.

They smoked in silence for a few minutes. Then all except Boyd went below.

CHAPTER 3

LEFT ALONE, Boyd moved slowly to the stern, leaned his forearms on the mizzen boom and stared down into the water.

He drew on his cigarette and let his mind wander. Strange though his surroundings were, he had the feeling of doing something he had done before. . . . He had leaned over the rail of a liner beside Heather Charrington, listening to her and watching the water flow endlessly past into the darkness astern.

He had known her for less than three days. He had met her when returning from America toward the end of the war. It had been a remarkable friendship, full of confidences yet almost impersonal—until the sudden end.

She had described it. "You are the easiest person to talk to I ever knew. You're a stranger for one thing and we'll never meet again. You don't love me or despise me. You aren't jealous. I am just someone from another world. You're not sympathetic or anything tiresome like that. I don't suppose you are interested really. But you are calm and wise and patient and you look kind."

It wasn't true, Boyd had thought. He wasn't wise and patient. But it was nice of her to say it. Glancing sideways at that pale, intent face, fine in detail as a miniature painted on ivory, he was not impersonal, either. But he said nothing. He looked back at the water and listened to her talking, late into the night, leaning over the rail of the blacked-out ship.

It was as if she were talking to herself, remembering aloud. While she talked his imagination had projected a moving picture on the water. He saw it again now.

In front of the house where she had grown up was a wide strip of sand dunes covered like a carpet with short grass. The Jersey herd grazed there and rabbits burrowed.

Beyond the dunes was the sea. There was a melon slice of yellow sand with a crescent of dry seaweed and driftwood drawn round it at the high-tide level. Then a shallow bay of green water sheltered by a cluster of little islands. Beyond was a much wider stretch of sea, dark blue, and often stormy. Beyond again were the big islands, the Hebrides, the last land before America.

Heather was the child of old parents. Her father, General Mor-

rison, from the first moment she remembered him was suffering from the rheumatic disease which caused his death; and her mother, physically, never quite recovered from the confinement. But they put no direct restraint upon her.

The estate people looked after her. The shepherd took her to the sheep dipping, and later "on the hill"—into the mountains—to help him with the lambing in the bitter days and nights of early spring. He told everybody that the little yellow-haired lass—"straight as a stick except for the tip of her nose"—had the ears of a wild creature for finding a newborn lamb and more wisdom than the vet man for all his book learning in caring for a sick ewe.

The gardener gave her the freedom of the walled garden—let her take the pick of the fruit before he carried it to the House, or crawl under the netting to forage for herself. Also he gave her the best plot in which to cultivate whatever she liked. She tried to grow wild flowers there.

The stalker, a man of unknown age in self-spun tweeds, taught her the mysteries of trout and deer, grouse and waterfowl. He was a blunt-spoken misanthrope, but he became a poet when he talked of Heather. He said she walked as finely as a stag, not caring if her long bare legs were scratched, yet was as gentle as a baby rabbit. He called her "my White Heather."

So she grew into her teens, queen of Amulree's five thousand acres* and a hundred human hearts.

Now and then she pondered what she would do when her parents died. Though devoted to them, she accepted the idea of being left in charge while she was still quite young. She knew what this would mean. She had learned from her father and the lawyers that the balance between upkeep and private income plus revenue could no longer be maintained unless the estate could be made to produce far more than formerly. "And that just can't be done—short of magic," the General said from his chair.

The thought that Amulree and its people's lives should deteriorate was as impossible for Heather to accept as that the estate could ever be sold. Somehow or other she must find a way out. Heather thought by herself, her idealistic mind dodging away from the lawyers' "sound advice." Always at the back of her mind was the comfortable conviction that her own man would solve her problems for her.

Her man was a creature firm in outline and vague in detail.

He had varied a good deal throughout the years—largely with the books she had been reading. But there was never any doubt that he would materialize, that she would recognize him instantly and that thereafter she need not worry any more.

She waited without impatience or anxiety. She was calmly certain that her man would love her as frankly and unhesitatingly as she would love him directly he appeared.

He came from the sea. One day—it was her eighteenth birthday—the wind was strong although the sun was bright, and she had walked out to Clach Alasdair to watch the waves climbing the rocks. To her surprise and alarm she saw a little yacht to windward of the reef. It was in great danger. But she was enough of a sailor to recognize how skillfully it was being handled by the man at the helm. He rounded the point and raced inland with the white waves chasing him, dodged between the little islands, nosed into the sheltered crescent bay and dropped anchor. Meanwhile Heather, eager to offer the yachtsman the Highland hospitality he surely needed, watched from the beach while he furled the sails and made everything shipshape. Then, without a glance at the land, he went below. Not until next morning did he row ashore to ask if he could buy eggs and bread.

When he met Heather, almost the first thing he said was that she must come aboard and see his yacht. His name was Richard Charrington. He gave her tea in the cabin, which delighted her by its toylike neatness. He told her that he was a yacht designer, working near Southampton but spending much of his time cruising to test his yachts. He always sailed alone. To Heather this life sounded brave, fascinating and free.

Charrington remained a long time at Amulree after the weather had moderated. General Morrison and his wife took to him at once; so did the Lowreys who lived at Salen, ten miles off, and whose daughter, Meg, had been Heather's lifelong friend. But—and this was a bitter disappointment to Heather—Richard Charrington could make no impression on the estate people. They were dour and silent in his presence.

But this hostility only made Heather love him more. The next summer—it was 1936 and she was nineteen years old—she married Richard Charrington in the kirk at Amulree. Very few of the estate people came to the ceremony or to the wedding breakfast. They went about their everyday tasks with dark faces, and

there was a sense of tension as there is before a thunderstorm. Heather and Richard escaped onto their yacht, pulled up her anchor and sailed away, beyond the islands, out into the ocean. . . .

The cigarette butt singed Boyd's fingers. He flicked it over the side and watched it drift away. There had been a lot more of Heather's story and he would be interested now to see another side of it—his own view of Charrington's character. She had said that she would like him to get to know her husband after the war. He was taking her literally. What was his first impression of the Skipper of *Heather Mary*? Boyd was too sleepy to decide. There would be plenty of time to get to know him thoroughly.

Meanwhile he must get some rest.

THROUGH HIS closed lids Marcus was conscious that the light in the saloon was burning. Sleepily he opened his eyes. Charrington was standing between the bunks, with his back to him. Beyond Charrington he could see the upper half of Boyd's body, wrapped in blankets, his paper-pale face crumpled in sleep. Charrington was staring down at him, intent and motionless.

For the sake of a few seconds' more rest, Marcus closed his eyes again. Soon he had the uncomfortable feeling that Charrington had turned and was looking at him. Defensively he kept his eyes tight shut. At last he heard a door opening—and saw the Skipper go out. . . . A funny way to rouse a crew, Harding thought, puzzled but still more sleepy.

For at least a couple of minutes longer there was silence. Then suddenly Charrington's voice broke out loud and hard:

"On deck, everybody! Up anchor in five minutes."

The crew, dressing silently while they woke up, heard him moving about over their heads. They came on deck into a dark night with black clouds splashed like inkstains on a gray blotting-paper sky. There were no stars. Only a few street lamps were burning in the town. Close to windward stood the steady red beacon at the end of the mole. The four men shivered. An impatient wind hustled them while they stood awkward and idle in its way. Last night's mood was inconceivable.

"Toby, Jack," Charrington called. "Get the anchor in when I tell you. . . . Marcus, stand by to break out the roller jib. . . . Boyd, I'll need you in the cockpit."

Charrington's voice was hard and sharp as a dog barking.

The yacht began to move downwind under the jibsail, slowly at first but rapidly gaining speed, the smooth water rustling from her bows with a noise like dry leaves.

Clear of the sheltering mole, mainsail set, *Heather Mary* charged into the crowd of waves. She plunged and leaped among them, throwing her crew off balance, forcing them to hold on. The noise had changed from a rustle to that of banging doors.

"Ready about. Lee-oh! Jib sheet, Marcus. Jump to it!"

The sails flapped angrily. Then the yacht leaned her shoulder on the water and began to surge ahead. The Skipper seemed everywhere at once, at the tiller or forward, guiding his crew's hands, instructing them, driving them with his tongue. The men did their small duties with breathless over-energy. The yacht settled down upon her course. . . .

During breakfast, which Toby served up, Yeoman diffidently relieved Charrington at the tiller. Marcus, who had felt a shameful pang of nausea at the thought of the airlessness below, stayed to help. He could not risk making a fool of himself.

When the others came on deck again, dawn was breaking with a searchlight dazzle. Only a few untidy clouds still hung about like rags left behind after polishing the sky. One of these near the horizon was squeezing out rain. The sea grew more and more rich in color, the white crests adding their contrast yet scarcely affecting the yacht, which rode steady and confident.

The sun climbed up and took the wet sparkle out of the sky, solidifying it. The land, a mile or two to starboard, was no longer a mere silhouette but clear as a neatly painted picture—shore and fields with rocky moors above. They were approaching a headland where a lighthouse stood, definite as an exclamation mark.

As they approached the lighthouse, Toby wondered why this white pillar should impress his thoughts so much. Then it occurred to him that it marked the last land he was likely to see until Bermuda. As they swept round the point, he saw the waves charging the rocks and leaping up in a furious column of spray.

"A penny for them," Charrington said.

"What?"

"For your thoughts, Toby."

"Nothing. Damn silly."

"But what?"

"Oh well—I've started enjoying being on the sea. But over

there it seems to be fighting the land to the death. Whose side are we on?"

"The land's," Charrington answered at once. "Our boat is a bit of the land. We'll be fighting the sea as an enemy till we reach the other side. It will be after our bones every hour whatever its mood seems to be. Don't let it bluff you.

"We'd better arrange some details," he said some minutes later. "Watches. Most convenient to divide up as you're sleeping—Marcus and Boyd, starboard watch; Toby and Jack, port watch. I'll keep myself free as navigator and skipper."

"You'll have to explain, Richard," Marcus said. "You seem to forget most of us are entirely new to this business."

"No, I don't, Marcus. But you're all far better than I could have hoped. However, about these watches. We'll have four-hour spells, I think. Midnight to four a.m., four to eight, eight to noon, noon to four p.m.; then the two dogwatches to change things round—four to six and six to eight; then four hours again—eight till midnight and so on."

"Who is on watch now?" Boyd asked.

"What's the time? Five to twelve. Let's say Boyd and Marcus stand watch from noon. Meanwhile—it's not often we'll be all together and awake, you know—are there any points that concern us as a whole?"

Yeoman swallowed. "Well, Skipper, if it's not impertinent could we know the theory of the voyage. I mean, of course you don't just draw a straight line from here to Bermuda—there's the curvature of the earth and the winds and currents. I've read what I could and realized it's complicated. But I wondered if you could explain quite simply the course we're going to steer."

Charrington looked at him and nodded. "Glad you're interested. Briefly it's like this. In these latitudes the prevailing winds are from the west. One can get across but it's the hell of a flog. But if you go south, you can swing like a man on a trapeze—the Portuguese Trades to Madeira, then the real Northeast Trades across the waist of the Atlantic. Then all we have to do is find Bermuda."

"I was wondering if we could see a chart," Yeoman said.

"Of course. I'll bring one into the saloon. Only trouble is, there's several charts involved and not much space to lay them out."

"I—I saw into your cabin when the door was open," Yeoman said. "You've got a wonderful chart table there—"

He stopped, dropping his eyes from Charrington's.

"There's a minute to noon—before we all break up," Charrington said. "Jack has reminded me of something I must tell you. This is the first time I've had a crew aboard *Heather Mary*. I won't burden you with standing orders. But the Skipper's cabin is out of bounds to the crew."

He spoke vigorously but telegraphically, without expression.

MARCUS HARDING was sitting on the bunk in his cabin—since it was daytime this was now a settee in the saloon—in a mood between annoyance and anxiety. He was annoyed with himself for being seasick below and not much help on deck. He stared straight in front of him, feeling discouraged. At his knees the swivel table swung slightly and continually. Opposite to him—about five feet away—Toby sat with an open book in front of him, tilting slowly forward and back as if in a rocking chair. Above, the lamp swung like an irregular pendulum. From the galley seven feet away came an occasional clatter of crockery and the smell of food. Clumsy old Jack Yeoman was cooking lunch. He said it was the first time he had ever tried to cook.

Boyd came down the companionway and into the saloon.

"Your turn, Colonel. The Skipper is waiting to initiate you."

Marcus went unhappily on deck. He settled in the cockpit beside Charrington and for five minutes struggled in silence with the lively yacht.

Then Charrington said, "You're a horseman, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"Have you noticed how similar steering a yacht is to riding a horse? A clumsy rider tries to use the reins like handle bars. A good man treats them as a means of communication—a nerve cord. He guides the horse by impulses rather than tugs. And he doesn't send the beast straight through every obstacle. He weaves through them. Waves are like obstacles on land."

After a while Marcus said, "I see what you mean but it's damned difficult."

"Running before the wind always is. But we're unlikely to do much of that before we reach the Trades, by which time you'll be a real sailor."

"Do you honestly think so?"

"I know it. Look here, there's something I want to talk to you

about. Food and water for a passage of this sort make quite a problem. One can't estimate within several weeks how long it will take. On the other hand space is limited so you can't carry much of a margin. I'm sure I've got enough but I've been so busy lately that I've forgotten just what we have got and where it's stowed. Will you take over the commissariat?"

"Delighted. That's something I have got experience of."

Marcus sat thinking, stroking his mustache with his left hand.

"I'll make a complete list and work out a ration based on the longest anticipated time—what, three months?"

"I leave it to you. But I don't think you'll have to ration us severely. I calculated on five appetites and you don't seem to have brought yours with you."

Marcus burst out laughing. "You are a leg-pulling old devil—"

"Just one other thing," Charrington went on. "There ought to be an official second-in-command. You are the obvious man. I'll tell the others."

Marcus sat silent, happy at last. What a leader Richard was! He would back him up. And in spite of his competence he needed backing up. Meg had been right. He was not hard through and through. The way he had delayed calling them, for instance—standing looking at each of them as they lay asleep—extraordinary. It was almost pathetic, too, that he still worshiped Heather so much that he could not bear anybody else even entering the cabin he had shared with her.

A COLD-GOOSE platter was substituted for the lunch Jack Yeoman apologetically offered. His face lit up when Charrington relieved him of future cooking chores and gave him a permanent assignment as bosun. Looking after sails and cordage was more in his line, and knots and lashings were just about his favorite hobby. In the two hours since lunch he had made the anchor so secure that nothing less than an axe could have freed it. Now he was taking his turn at the helm. The wind had dropped to a gentle breeze. England was still visible to starboard, a dim bluish outline. The sea horizon was dotted here and there by the smoke of steamers, but they did not appear likely to pass close. Jack yawned, he could do with forty winks like the others were having.

Suddenly from below him, clear and loud and friendly, he heard a woman say, "*Good night, children.*"

He started violently. Before he had collected his wits a man's voice announced, "This is the BBC Home Service. Here is the shipping forecast. . . ."

So there was a radio aboard, in the Skipper's cabin by the sound. Such a little ship and so much one didn't know about her yet. He tried to listen, but became puzzled by the areas—Sole, Fastnet, Dogger, Finisterre—and was always behind in attention when the expected weather was announced. It was going to blow in some parts and in others it was going to rain with brighter intervals—the usual sort of thing but so much more important now. Pity he had not followed it exactly.

Charrington came on deck with a half-full bottle of gin in his hand. Yeoman smiled. He could do with a spot.

Charrington went to the compass, tilted it within the binnacle and studied it closely. "Damned bubble," he said under his breath. He put down the bottle, took a screw driver from his pocket and began working on the compass.

While he was doing this, Boyd and Marcus came on deck.

"Gin. Good show," Marcus said.

"Air bubble in the compass fluid," Charrington muttered. "Got to fill up with spirit." He removed the metal cap and tilted the bottle over the opening. Marcus looked shocked.

Charrington screwed the cap into place again, tilted the compass on its gimbals and studied it closely. Then he stood up, re-corked the bottle and threw it over the side.

They watched it drift away astern, lurching over the waves.

Boyd said quietly, "Somebody's lucky."

"What's that?" Charrington asked.

"I was always told by my nurse that when you pick up a bottle on the shore there's probably a message in it. But the fellow who finds this one will get three fingers of gin."

"It was no use to us. We don't drink at sea—except on special occasions. Then we'll open a new one."

"What, if I may ask, constitutes a special occasion?" Boyd asked.

"You will recognize it when you meet it," Charrington said.

MARCUS WAS at the helm. The night was squally. In the saloon they were smoking and talking over the cup of tea which had followed their meal.

"How long? Nine years," Charrington was saying. "I fell in love with her at first sight. But I couldn't afford her."

"What happened?" Toby asked.

"My wife gave her to me. What are you clicking your tongue about, Jack?"

"I was thinking that was just like Miss Heather," Yeoman answered. "She was always impulsive with her money."

"You were giving her good advice even then, were you? Never mind. That was the best investment Mary ever made. The lead ballast alone is now worth more than she paid for her."

"Have you sailed in her every year?" Toby asked.

"Yes—except for the war, of course. I spent one cruising season in a gunboat and four behind barbed wire."

There was a pause, then Boyd said, "Tell me if you will—after being imprisoned so long didn't you want to be somewhere freer, less constricting than on a yacht?"

"Good Lord, what is freer than sailing to anywhere you please, answerable to no man? The only thing that kept me sane those four years was planning cruises and imagining us doing them."

Each of his hearers noticed the word "us." Charrington lapsed into silence, drawing strongly at his pipe so that the small saloon was blue with smoke.

Toby said, "You planned, and did, a good many escapes, too, didn't you?"

"One couldn't just sit there," Charrington said.

Impulsively, Yeoman interrupted the emotionally charged silence. "Look here, Skipper, I'm glad of a chance to tell you this before everyone. I said I'd had sailing experience. I've sailed all my life—but I've never been on board a yacht. It's all been with models. So I deceived you but it was only because I was so keen to come. You can put me ashore if you like—but if you don't I'll do my very best to make up for it." All this poured out in a stream while Yeoman sat looking miserably into his teacup.

Charrington put a hand on his shoulder. "My dear Jack, you didn't deceive me."

"You knew?"

"One doesn't choose a crew for a trip like this without making certain inquiries. I know more about you all than you think. But don't be worried. I wouldn't exchange a man of you for the best yachtsman in England. You are exactly the crew I wanted."

CHAPTER 4

JACK YEOMAN had been alone on deck for an hour since he had relieved Toby at ten o'clock. He had settled himself in the cockpit with the tiller in the crook of his arm. The yacht ambled along over the swell.

He thought of Miss Heather. During the fortnight after the death of his wife he had brooded continually and could not rouse himself to take interest in the office or even his war work as Senior Warden of which he had formerly been so proud. How utterly lonely he had been, Tilly away in Devon with her evacuated school. . . . Then Miss Heather had appeared like a good fairy. In her impulsive, gentle way she had taken charge of him and healed his spirit with her magic. Afterward he had tried to express his gratitude to her in letters. He had not done it adequately, of course, but he had been surprised by the poetry he discovered in himself.

Staring in front of him, Jack saw the light go on below and Charrington's head rise through the suddenly illuminated square of the opened hatch. His features looked strange with their shadows thrown upward.

Charrington came and sat down companionably by the tiller. For some time he smoked in silence, then he said, "Jack, I'm glad to have you on board. I've heard so much about you."

"From Miss Heather? Skipper, there's so much to tell you. . . ."

Charrington waited but Yeoman could say no more. He wanted to show his gratitude to Miss Heather by helping the proud and lonely man whom she had left behind. But Colonel Harding had warned him against talking to the Skipper about his wife. . . .

At midnight Boyd came up to take the helm. They greeted him in silence, and for a few minutes sat quietly together in the cockpit while the yacht moved with a silk-rustling sound over the dark water. Then Charrington and Yeoman went below, leaving Boyd alone with the tiller under his arm—with the sound and the association to bring Heather's story back into his mind.

THE HONEYMOON was to be spent in a cruise round the west coast of Ireland and so to Southampton Water where Charrington's shipyard was and their home would be. On the day after her

marriage, Heather sailed for the first time beyond the Hebrides, beyond the outposts of the land which contained Amulree. Everything she had known was dropping below the horizon.

In her mood of romantic excitement she was thrilled by this. Everything she had known would rise again above the horizon still lovelier and happier when they sailed back again. She wanted to share this idea with her husband, who sat at the tiller with his back to the drowning land. They were alone as newly married people rarely are. It was a scene for perfect confidence.

When she had described what she felt, Richard looked at her indulgently and answered that there were other beautiful places besides Amulree and other seas than those which lapped her islands. The world was theirs. They were bound to no single part of it.

The sunset while they were speaking was hanging in front of them like a molten rainbow, and the land astern was every now and then coming up faintly to wave good-by. But he would not allow her to stay and watch it. He hove to the yacht, put his strong arm around her slim body and took her below.

Early next morning she came on deck and looked eastward. But there was no land to be seen.

She loved Richard. He was—as she had known from the first moment of meeting him—her man. He dominated her. That was entirely right. Only, after the freedom she had scarcely appreciated, it was difficult to adjust herself to being dominated.

Although she was a competent sailor she was not allowed to steer except under his close supervision. If she made any technical suggestion, he answered kindly enough but as a man talks to a child. When once she persisted he became impatient. So she left the yacht to him and did what she was told, silently and anxiously. She longed to please and was used to being praised.

She tried to talk interestingly. Of course she talked of Amulree, for that was the most interesting subject she knew. Again he answered kindly but she was sensitive enough to realize at once that he did not want her even to think of Amulree or of anything connected with it. Alone among the people she knew, he called her by her second name, Mary. He never called her Heather. She began to understand why.

He was blindly jealous. The realization of this was not at first displeasing. But soon she realized that he was also jealous of the

yacht, *Helen*, which he had himself designed. That was why Heather was not allowed to take any responsible part in sailing her.

So, instead of the free and open companionship she had envisaged, their days were spent in order and obedience, and—on her part—in anxiously rehearsed conversation. For when she remained silent he insisted on knowing what she was thinking. And after each day there came the night and the enclosing walls of the cabin and the callous murmur of water. In spite of herself she began to dread the sunset.

Still she was hopeful and determined. When the cruise—the honeymoon—was over there was Richard's house. There she would have her own sphere.

It was a red brick house with a tiny, tidy garden protected from the road by a privet hedge. The furniture was nothing in particular. Richard said that sort of thing did not matter when you were ashore. He was not interested in the "trivialities" of chintzes, pictures, wallpapers and flower vases. Quite soon he told her they were going to sea again—to try out a new yacht.

Again, with nobody else near them, she experienced the pain and silly worry of a triangular existence. Richard loved her, masterfully. He also loved the yacht. He was jealous of both of them. Heather could do nothing to the yacht. If the yacht behaved badly in rough weather and upset his wife, he was furious.

When they returned, Heather found a letter from Meg Lowrey suggesting a visit. She was delighted. A third person would relieve the tension.

Meg spent an observant week with them—then told Heather severely that she was driving Richard crazy by her obstinacy.

Heather did not try to defend herself, but longing for comfort and advice she described some of her difficulties. Meg cut her short. Stuff and nonsense! It was plain as the nose on your face how much Richard adored her. However many people were about he never took his eyes off her. Richard was perfectly charming—everybody said so. Meg herself was going to become engaged to a soldier named Marcus Harding who had come up to Salen for the fishing, and she gave Heather a lecture on the perfect marriage. Heather listened, thinking her own thoughts.

One evening Richard came home in a state of unusual excitement. He had seen the perfect yacht. Walking up and down the room, unable to sit down, he described her. She was a racing yawl

with an over-all length of fifty feet. She had the delicate lines of a six-meter but was as strong as an ocean cruiser, and possessed storage space for food and water enough to carry one half round the world. She was for sale as a bargain. The shame was that he could not afford her even at the knock-down price.

Heather listened, pleased by her husband's enthusiasm. Next day she went to see the yacht. Heather, who loved beauty, fell in love with her, just as her husband had done. And while she looked at the yacht an idea came into her head. She could not afford the purchase price—without digging deep into the capital which belonged to Amulree. Yet she would buy the yacht. She would change the name to *Heather Mary* and give her to Richard. The yacht he loved would be identified with the wife he loved.

Very soon afterward, Richard was the owner of *Heather Mary*.

They went on a trial cruise together. The yacht behaved perfectly but the human relationship was not a success. The absurd jealousy, although subdued, occasionally came out in an enigmatic and more bitter form. Charrington, as the skipper of *Heather Mary*, was less sure of his authority over his wife, and in that state he could be most imperiously cruel.

Hurt almost to breaking point but still determined to succeed in her marriage, Heather began to work upon another plan.

Next summer—it was 1939—she persuaded Richard to take a cruise to Amulree. If she could teach him to know and to love the place as she did, it would be the perfect bond.

The morning they sailed in, a crowd of people waited on the shore. Even in the flood of greetings Heather noticed that Richard was behaving in the most simple, likable and cordial way that anybody could desire. She was utterly happy.

During the first two days of the visit she remained, almost deliriously, in the same mood. Every waking moment was spent with her parents or in visits to the crofters, seeing the new babies, recognizing the old animals, revisiting favorite places. She felt herself revived, felt the old strength and courage. Richard went out hunting and she saw little of him.

On the second night, when she went up to her room—the room which had been hers all her life—she threw the window wide and stood looking out through the opal moonlight, across the dark folds of the dunes and the silver sea to the black silhouettes of the islands. Heather knelt down and leaned her breast against the



window sill, breathing all this in and in until it began to hurt.

It hurt because she wanted to share it. It was too beautiful for one person alone. She heard Richard come through the door, walk across the room and stop behind her. . . . She waited.

He put his hands under her elbows, lifted her up and turned her round. She looked eagerly into his face . . . and her heart shrank into a tight, hard ball.

He drew the curtains. "Time for bed," he said.

She remained for some moments with her back to the window. "Don't you like being here?" she asked calmly.

He answered with aggressive joviality, "Not as much as you do, obviously. Everyone treats you like a princess."

"Doesn't that please you?"

"Princess is the wrong word. They pet you and patronize you. You are their mascot—and you adore it. You ought to have more dignity."

She was in a thin nightdress and felt as helpless as a little girl. He never took his eyes from her. She stared back at him, shivering, her fists clenched, her eyes cold and hard.

In the morning, in a mood of desperation, she walked to Clach Alasdair, the point from which she had first seen Richard fighting the storm in the little yacht. The sea was calm and no vessel was in sight. There was only a big white solan goose flying majestically up and down. Watching the bird, she tried to analyze why she had accepted Richard as her man. The method of his coming had caught her imagination. She had built a picture of him before they met, and the rest had confirmed it. She was fascinated by his dark, deep-set eyes, and by his voice which made everything he said exciting. She admired a man who did exactly what he wanted and who accepted the challenge of the elements.

Was her love for him built only on this? She compared it with her feelings for Amulree. If she should be banished forever from Amulree she would not want to live. . . . For three years she had struggled to preserve the Richard to whom she had given her love. Bringing him back to the place where she had met him was the climax. At the result she felt no anger with him, but . . .

The white bird closed its wings and fell like a stone into the sea.

Heather knew without question what was best to do. But instinct and experience told her it would not be simple to convince Richard of her reasoning. She decided to postpone the explanation until they sailed, but she dreaded the time between.

Fortune, in a twisted way, now seemed to favor her. The news of the outside world was bad. When the newspapers arrived next afternoon Richard, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, said that they must return at once.

To see them off, there was a crowd of men and women on the shore, a piper among them. And while, with Richard, she sailed slowly out of the bay the notes of a Jacobean lament followed her across the water and echoed in her heart so that she could not have said when her ears ceased to hear them.

*Better lo'ed ye canna' be.
Will ye no come back again?*

IT WAS a hard passage, stormy all the way. But the struggle between personalities was harder still. Richard would not take her

seriously at first. The toy princess was petulant at being taken away from her kingdom.

Whether or not a war was coming they must settle their own lives. Tense as a watch spring, Heather kept exactly to her argument. They had both been in love, passionately and wholeheartedly, with ideals of their own imaginations. She took the blame for failing to live up to his ideal of her and for seeing him differently from what he was. He was happy only in his work at Southampton and in his cruises as skipper of *Heather Mary*. She had given her love to both the man and the yacht but only felt her true self at Amulree. So they must live apart.

Richard replied in anger. . . . If she did not get what she wanted from their marriage it was her own fault for not asking it. Had he not given up a cruising holiday to take her to Amulree? But in any case they had vowed to love each other for better or worse. What was this suggestion about separating? Was that marriage before God or man? If she did not love him—then she loved someone else. Who was it? She would not tell him? He would discover for himself and settle with the man. But he would never let her go. Only death could part them.

He terrified her, shouting with such fury. It went on like a succession of storms throughout most of the passage.

ON THE MAT in the hall was a telegram. Richard was ordered to report for duty. He changed into uniform while she packed his things. Heather had already realized that her own life did not matter. She, with Richard and fifty million others, was caught up like iron dust by the same magnet.

For most of her local acquaintances Mr. Chamberlain's heart-broken declaration of war was like a starter's pistol. They were off at once on duties long ago prepared for. Many of the men had gone away. The women put on trousers and were self-assured and busy. But Heather did not know what to do. Richard had not allowed her to volunteer for any of the "ridiculous" women's services. Her place was in the home, he said. So now she was unprepared for anything, living in an empty house which was certainly not a home. There was nothing to prevent her from returning to Amulree. But it seemed like running away.

Richard was stationed on the Norfolk coast. After a month he wrote and told her to join him. She hesitated—then decided that

she had no right to think of herself while the war lasted. He was doing something useful and she believed that she might help him.

Until the next summer she lived in little comfortless hotels in the small ports where he was based. In these strange surroundings, feeling impersonal, she lacked confidence to insist that she should do active war work. But more and more there grew in her the longing for Amulree. If only she could find a sufficient reason for going there, she would become a real person again.

Heather, when she reached this stage of her story—although she had not been telling it in these words—stopped and looked at Boyd as he leaned beside her over the rail of the liner.

"I believe Fate has a cruel, beastly sense of humor. I didn't use to, but I do now," she said.

He waited for her to say something more.

"The thing I had been longing and praying for was a good reason for going to Amulree. I got it. My father died."

The phosphorescent water slipped by the ship's side like an unwinding film. Boyd moved, just touching Heather with his arm.

She described the Highland burial, the coffin on a farm cart and the piper's lament—the slow, high-pitched, wavering music.

There was a lot of solicitor's business to be attended to. In the absence of the junior partners on military service the senior clerk was sent to Amulree. He was a kind, unclelike man who told her that, of all the place names in his dusty files, Amulree was the one which had inspired him with a wish to visit it. They became great friends.

A fortnight later Heather's mother fell downstairs and broke her arm. She had been sturdily brave and competent since her husband's death, carrying on the tradition. Now she had done this stupid thing. The dear old lady was so disgusted with herself that she turned her face to the wall and died within a week.

Heather remained at Amulree for a month longer. Then—not only because Richard was beginning to write impatiently—she felt bound to return. The estate could manage very well without her. But she could not go back to the East Coast lodgings. She wrote to Meg for advice.

Meg answered her by return post. She was in charge of female personnel in the cipher department at the Foreign Office. There was work there for girls of Heather's education. She could share Meg's flat in Hampstead and entertain Richard whenever he had

leave. Meg's husband was overseas and her children were in the country so there was plenty of room. This is what Heather did.

Although the war was now fully joined this might have been almost a pleasant period. But Heather found it increasingly exhausting. This was not primarily due to the bombing, although that nagged at her nerves, nor to the long office hours which were more and more tiring as she was promoted to responsible work.

There were plenty of gunboat battles in the North Sea now, and Richard's periods of leave were rare. But he came when he could, invariably unannounced; perhaps only for a few hours. And when he came he expected Heather to leave the office—which Meg could generally arrange—or to be waiting for him in the flat. He demanded a hero's welcome. He was always in a state of excitement. He was even excited in his sleep. Sometimes he shouted orders. Once he seemed to fight a whole savage battle at her side. "Kill the swine! Drown them! Blow them to bits!" Heather had no love for her country's enemies but she felt she was being mistaken for them.

Once, on a Sunday, she went to tea with Jack Yeoman and his wife. When she was about to leave, a heavy raid started and they persuaded her to remain with them for the night. She returned early next morning and found that Richard had come and gone in her absence. Meg told her that he had been terribly upset. Heather wondered what he would write to her. But she got no letter. Instead she received a telegram which said he was missing, believed captured.

Before it was confirmed that Richard was a prisoner, Patrick Canning, a fellow officer, came up to London "to put her mind at rest." He had been in the same action, "a nasty rough one—much too many E-boats." Richard had led them into the attack and fought like a tiger. They had sunk one of the supply ships the E-boats were escorting and damaged the other. "But it was one of those parties it's so difficult to get away from." He had last seen Richard standing on the deck of his crippled gunboat.

When Richard's capture was officially reported to Heather by the Admiralty, her overwhelming feeling was relief. The self-justifying part of her mind tried to tell her this was because he was safe. But she knew it was because she was safe from him.

Now her whole heart was in the work that she had undertaken. She was good at it. She took the utmost care with the messages

which she coded or decoded and worked for longer hours than her strength allowed. She lived on her nerves. For any woman complete secrecy is a strain. But she had found something that she could do better than most and she worked on without rest.

Every now and then came letters or post cards from Richard. They were almost as exacting and exhausting as his visits used to be. Prisoners were only allowed to send one letter and three post cards a month, and their length was strictly limited. It was evident that Richard spent much of his time condensing as much into these communications as possible. The telegraphic style did not hide the passion. He asked all she had done and whom she had seen. He told her of their intimate life together when he "got out." (He never mentioned their differences.) He sketched the cruises they would make alone on *Heather Mary*. While she read she could see his eyes and even feel his breath.

She tried gently to show him that the old life was finished. In his replies this part of her letters was ignored.

Heather took no real holiday until the spring of 1944 when, for her health, she was directly ordered to go away for three weeks. She went to Amulree.

Meg's husband, Marcus Harding, was on leave at Salen, ten miles along the coast, and came over every day for the fishing. Heather liked him. He was an unexacting companion, quietly content even when untangling a cast. He made little jokes which were not very funny but which she laughed at because she needed to laugh. But chiefly she liked him because he was so appreciative of everything concerned with Amulree.

When she returned to the Foreign Office, everybody said how well she looked. She felt it for a day or two; and then the press and bustle of London which she had always disliked weighed on her more heavily than ever. Meg, in her capacity as chief of the women's personnel branch, had already told her there would soon be a vacancy in Washington which she could fill if she liked. Heather found herself thinking about it a good deal.

Then she received a letter from Richard which puzzled and startled her. It was all about a jersey which he had knitted for her. He gave such details as "vertical tucks and buttoned band cuffs." He hoped the breast measurement was correct. Heather was alarmed. His letters, she thought, had become increasingly strange lately but now apparently he had gone quite mad.

She showed the letter to Patrick Canning, who was up in London on leave. Patrick had known Richard since school days and admired him enormously. He had the knack of recreating the man whom Heather had loved, but he was tolerantly conscious of this man's faults as well. Heather had become very fond of him indeed, as of a wise elder brother.

When he read the letter, he burst out laughing. "The cunning old fox!"

"What do you mean?"

Patrick looked at her with a smile in his eyes.

"Didn't you know that Richard has been trying to get out every moment since they put him behind barbed wire? Of course he couldn't say it in his letters but—you must have realized."

Heather stared back into the brown interested eyes. Phrases she had not understood began to make sense. Without at first knowing why, she began to feel afraid.

"How do you know this?"

"He has made at least half a dozen damn clever attempts at escape. Three times he has got clear of the camp. Other people with him got right away. Richard has been caught each time only by bad luck. You have very nearly had him home."

Heather got up and moved slowly round the room looking for a cigarette. She had taken it for granted that she would have time to prepare herself for the moment of meeting Richard again.

"But that doesn't explain about the knitting," she said.

"Escape is the devil of a mental strain. With every German indoctrinated and trained from babyhood it is about ten times as difficult as it was in the last war. The prisoners themselves find it hard not to talk. Organizing, which is Richard's strongest suit, is about as difficult as running some vast business concern without letting anybody's right hand into the secret of what his left hand is doing. No ordinary person can keep it up for long. If they don't get out themselves, one of two things happens. They go mad or else they take up knitting. The German security guards know that is the choice, and without doubt Richard is a marked man by now. So he has taken up knitting."

"You mean he is really interested in knitting?"

"Of course not. It's all a blind. That letter was for the benefit of the German censor. I bet he is still planning to get out. He might walk in on you this very moment. . . . Heather, dear, there

is no need to look so worried. Richard can look after himself. What you want is to forget your troubles in a good party. And I've got the very thing all arranged. If you won't be a gay grass widow, you shall come as chaperon."

CHAPTER 5

TOBY looked at his watch. Five minutes past four. An hour and fifty-five minutes until he could call Yeoman. Toby thought about Jack Yeoman.

The Skipper seemed particularly interested in Jack. He had long talks with him during his night watches. Once or twice Jack had looked worried when he came below. Toby couldn't guess what it was all about. There was not much chance for private conversation—except possibly in the middle of the night when you were either asleep or busy.

He took his hand off the tiller. It scarcely moved. The yacht could steer herself. He relaxed. An hour and a half until he could call Yeoman. In that time he must get things straight. . . . He loved Elaine. He had met her when, having taken part in the last phases of the war in Europe, he had come home feeling dissatisfied and unsettled. She was small and very pretty. She was restful and unexacting. She understood without his having to explain. Seeing her every day, the delirious memory of July 1944 had faded into a romantic dream and he had begun to picture with contentment his future with Elaine. He had felt justified in leaving her for a few months on the principle that the passage would give him something original to write about. And now he found that the yacht was called *Heather Mary*. It brought the dream to life again. Her name in the log, on the life belt in front of him . . . it hurt. It was going to be very difficult to think about Elaine.

The breeze had died away until it only just filled the sails. Toby's watch ticked busily, but the luminous hands appeared motionless. He waited for the dawn.

He lit a cigarette with Elaine's lighter. Dear, faithful Elaine. But here upon the endless water, where he might have been floating in space, time was swept away like the smoke of his cigarette. . . . He was in the uniform of a subaltern. He parked his car in Soho Square and walked through narrow streets to the "99."

He was thinking, "Something special, something to remember, has got to happen tonight."

A party of a dozen was sitting at a corner table in the night club. Patrick Canning was the only one Toby knew. He apologized for being late. Patrick jumped to his feet, tall and striking in his naval uniform, his frank face beaming with pleasure.

"Never too late, Toby! This is a classic party. We've even got a chaperon. Sit down there beside Jonquil."

Toby asked Jonquil to dance. When they had shuffled halfway round the crowded floor, he said, "Are you the chaperon?"

"Do I look like a chaperon?" she asked, pouting her pretty lips.

Toby's heart was swelling and he longed to confide. "This is my last night out," he said.

"You don't seem to be enjoying it much," Jonquil answered.

The music stopped and they went back to the table. Everybody seemed to be talking at the top of his voice. Toby felt depressed. He had wanted a party very much but he was out of tune with this one. He tried to think of an excuse for going home.

"Aren't you going to take any notice of me, Cousin Toby?"

It was spoken not loudly but in so clear and unusual a voice that it came to him through all the laughter and shouted conversation. She was leaning forward across the table—eyes like the sky after rain and parted lips. He knew immediately that she was entirely different from every other woman in the room.

"Don't you remember?" she asked. "We used to bathe together with nothing on."

"Yes, of course," Toby said suddenly and enthusiastically, remembering nothing at all.

"Toby," Patrick said, "you must not flirt with the chaperon in public. Take her into the jungle."

They danced together. She talked all through the first dance, eagerly like a person who has lived long among strangers.

She was Heather Mary. Her father and his mother had been cousins. A dozen years before, he had been to Amulree for a summer holiday. "I asked Patrick who was coming and recognized your name," she said. "I wanted to talk to you about Amulree. But you have forgotten all about Amulree—and me."

He protested that he did remember Amulree and her. He asked her to go on talking about Amulree. He wanted to hear her say the word again. . . . When the music stopped they walked very

slowly back toward the table. Patrick stood waiting for Heather.

Toby sat down next to Jonquil. He felt lost. As well as he could he watched Heather. He tried calmly to analyze why she had attracted him so strongly. She was pretty, of course, very pretty. But it wasn't just that. She was out of place here. Although she was talking as vivaciously as anybody, there was something almost desperate in her gaiety. She was trying hard to fit in, but it was difficult—just as it was for him.

He caught her eyes. He knew that they must dance once more and that they must share their private feelings.

She came to him quickly on the floor, smiling, and fitted into his arms. She was wearing a blue dress of some silky stuff. The drummer was shaking gourds with shot inside them and the music was wild. The rhythm was too quick to let them talk but he watched the color growing in her face. He held her closer.

Suddenly it came to an end. She stood in front of him, panting and laughing, "Oh, it's wonderful—" she said.

"What's wonderful?"

"To be happy and dance and—" She met his eyes.

"This is my last night," he said. "Tomorrow I'll be cooped up until—"

"I understand."

They began to dance again, slowly and silently, not looking at each other. They moved like that until they were opposite the door. Then he took her by both hands and said, "Come."

"Where?"

"Outside."

"Why?"

"You said you understood."

She studied his face. "You will have other nights, Toby. I don't think I shall. Please don't spoil it."

"I promise not to spoil it. You are not really happy here. Please come—just for a little."

"But Toby—why?" She looked at him tenderly but full of doubt.

"Because I want to see what color your eyes are in the dark."

"Like cats," she hissed, suddenly gay again, and pressed her nails into the palms of his hands.

They found his car and got into it in silence. Although they were alone together he did not dare to touch her at first.

At last he said: "I wanted something like this so much. I

wanted something I could take with me and be happy and proud about and not ashamed at all. I don't want to be killed. I don't even want to kill anybody. But I've got to try. And I need something like this—you alone, not in a crowd—that I can take out of my memory to help me when everything else is foul."

She touched his face. Her eyes glistened like pools of water in the dark. He could feel her heart beating very fast.

Then he felt her stiffen. His own body grew rigid as he listened. It wasn't a car. It wasn't an airplane—quite. He had never heard a buzz bomb but he knew immediately that this was one.

Neither of them spoke. They remained exactly as they had been while the sound approached. It came nearer and nearer until it seemed almost directly above them. Then it stopped.

There was absolute silence. They remained in the dark together, the pools of her eyes looking into his. They waited.

The explosion came with such shattering noise and blast that for some moments they were stunned. Then the things which had been hurled into the air began thudding down with an appalling clatter. It was as if the sky were raining houses. Something struck the hood of the car, making it rock.

They got out. She gripped his hand and they began to run. It did not take long to reach the place. Half a dozen houses had been destroyed. The street was full of smoking rubble and broken glass. The air was so thick with dust that one could scarcely breathe. The bomb had fallen exactly on the little club.

Heather collapsed in



Toby's arms. It was some time before she was calm enough to tell him her address so that he could take her home. But surely that had been a sign, surely—for if she had not come out with him, they would both have been dead, too. So why had she gone away to America without answering his letters? Toby sat in the gray light, wondering.

Charrington came on deck. For several minutes he stood absorbed. Then he loosed the staysail sheet from its cleat and let it run out a foot or two. He adjusted the jib sheet and the mizzen. The tiller pressed against Toby's arm and the rhythmic swish and sigh of water at the bow increased in volume.

Charrington sat down in the cockpit. All this time he had not spoken. He lit his pipe and sat smoking. Suddenly he said, "Sorry I was so damn stupid as not to tell you the name of the yacht."

Toby did not answer. He sat silently while the dawn light grew. He could feel Charrington's eyes on him.

THEY HAD been at sea six days. The waves had changed character. They had scarcely increased in size but there was an aggressive sting in them. They put their heads down and charged the yacht. Some vaulted aboard and washed along her whole length, hissing excitedly. Others struck the bow, exploded into the air and came down in bucketloads and bathfuls onto the deck. But most impressive was the sense of strain. The sails bulged outward, trembling at their edges. The mast strained audibly against the weather stays. And the tiller strained in Boyd's arms as he sat with Marcus in the cockpit. The wind was cold, and the mottled purple sky showed that the sun was setting.

Charrington stood studying the horizon, the sea and the sails with more than his usual intentness. "Call the other watch, Marcus," he said at last.

When Toby and Jack came on deck they furled the mizzen and the staysail, set the small jib and the trysail instead of the mainsail. *Heather Mary* became more docile.

"Best to get most of it off her before dark," Charrington said, and sent Toby and Jack below again to prepare supper. "Give me a hand with the hatch covers, Boyd. We'll make her snug as we can. Quite a bit must have gone down the forehatch already."

As they pulled the covers out of the sail locker, Marcus asked, "You're expecting a bad storm?"

"Are they ever good?"

For twenty minutes they were busily engaged securing everything on deck. Then Charrington asked, "Can you get the generator engine working on the pump, Boyd?"

"I'll try."

Moving slowly and methodically Boyd uncovered the engine. It sighed, coughed and stuttered, then settled to a steady purr, and dirty water began squirting through a rubber pipe over the side.

"Now we'll rig life lines between the mast and the cockpit. Then supper ought to be ready," Charrington said. "We'll lash the helm and have a good meal."

It was the first meal they had taken all together since the night before they sailed. It was simple yet abundant. And although the swinging table held the plates at head level for those on one settee and waist level for those upon the other, Marcus found that his appetite was as good as it had ever been on shore. But the precautions which the Skipper had ordered while on deck and the feeling now of surging faster and faster into the growing night kept him silent until the meal was almost done.

Then he said, "Tell me frankly, Richard—it's better we all know what we are in for—what do you expect?"

"I've only the shipping report to go on—which you all heard. The wind will go on freshening all night. When it veers a few points, we'll be able to go about and still hold a course that will take us clear of Finisterre—our proper course, in fact."

Charrington turned to Marcus. "You started by asking if it would be a bad storm. All storms are bad. They are filthy things. I hate them. But the consolation is that natural laws can't be broken. The sea has to keep the rules. So if you prepare for the worst and you and your ship are sound, it's only a case of toughing it out until the storm has spiraled its way past you."

"A good many ships have been lost without trace, haven't they, Skipper?" Yeoman asked. "How does that come about?"

"For a man sailing alone illness or falling overboard can finish the yacht. For a crew this size it's restricted to all the water tanks springing leaks when one is in mid-ocean, or fire, collision with a wreck, lightning, or what is called a freak wave. A freak wave is the product of a freak storm, meaning a storm which some particular mariner did not understand. I have always taken pains to study the weather."

"Study the intentions of the enemy," Marcus said.

"Exactly. Hence the precautions just now. I don't know when you'll get another good meal all round, but it's time you were on deck again, Marcus. I'm going to get some sleep. Call me when the wind has veered to west."

THE SEA, a black mass dotted with momentary explosions of white, heaved all around Marcus, sitting beside the tiller. In his ears was the noise of traveling at speed, punctuated by the thud, splash and disappointed hiss of waves. There was nothing definite to see beyond the white triangle of the reefed staysail and the thin wedge of jib which reflected a greenish blur from the star-board light. The yacht was plowing out toward the middle of the dark Atlantic, and there was nothing one could do about it.

Nothing? One might at least be responsible for what was happening. He unlashd the tiller and took it under his arm. A wave broke over the bow and swept aft. It struck him, stinging his eyes and pattering against his oilskin.

As holding the course came more easily, he thought of other things. With extraordinary clarity he remembered an incident during that leave in 1944. He no longer felt lonely.

It was a wild April day. In a sunny interval Heather and he had scrambled up onto a little hill by the river mouth. Below them, beyond the tawny fringe of seaweed lay the sea, bluer than any other blue. The air was so clear that one could distinguish the white houses twelve miles away.

"One can nearly see America," he said.

"I don't want to see America," Heather answered, like a child.

He looked down at her. Her oilskin coat was thrown open. Her face was pointed directly into the wind like—like some particularly delicate kind of weathercock, with her hair flowing behind.

"Meg thinks you ought to go to America," he told her. "Richard will be back as soon as the war is over. Meanwhile you ought to break the old associations. London is bad for your nerves. Meg is half sorry she got you into the Foreign Office now. But she thinks she could fix it for you to go to Washington as a cipherette."

"Is this you talking or Meg?" Heather asked.

"Well, they are her ideas, I suppose. I scarcely knew you—did I?—until a week ago. But I can't help seeing her point."

"She sent you up here to persuade me?"



"She didn't send me. I had a fortnight's leave, before going overseas. Meg couldn't get away and she knows I hate London. You'd told her I could have your fishing if I came to her people's place. And of course she knew we'd meet."

He moved so that he could see more of Heather's face. She was still looking into the wind. There was something definite and yet elusive about her eyes, like blue stones at the bottom of a clear swift river.

"Meg always wants to arrange my life," she said.

He laughed and changed the subject. "I hope we are going to get better weather for our last week. This leave is so darned precious for both of us."

"What do you mean by better weather?" she asked.

"Not quite so much wind and rain."

"I like wind and rain," she said. "When it's calm it's like when you wake up in the night and it's a long time till dawn and you can't help thinking."

As if it were answering her wishes a squall broke over them. Heather buttoned her oilskin coat, and the big yellow fisherman's hat which had hung behind her shoulders she pulled onto her head.

But she did not move except to put her arm through his. And so they stood side by side thrusting themselves against the pressure of the wind until the islands which had vanished came gradually into view again and the smoky sea became once more vividly blue.

AT TWO O'CLOCK Yeoman was on watch. Charrington had come on deck to supervise a change in course. Now *Heather Mary*

was lying over on the other tack and settling down as if she liked it. Charrington lashed the helm and hunched his back to the wind.

"Shove up, Jack. We'll sit close together so we can keep each other warm and talk without shouting."

"Wind's a bit strong," Yeoman said, conscious of a disturbing sense of intimacy.

"This is only a strong breeze."

"But you said there was going to be a storm."

"There will be. Are you worried?"

"No, I'm excited. It will be something to remember and talk about. . . . Skipper, you can't be worried by storms, either. You know what to do. But you said you hated them. How's that?"

"I hate my enemies."

They sat pressed against each other while the wind blew by like a solid thing invisible in the darkness. The Skipper's last remark seemed strange to Yeoman, but he had to make some reply.

"This isn't an ordinary conversation," he said. "You couldn't have an ordinary conversation now."

"Why do you say that?" Charrington asked, studying the earnest face dimly lighted by the glow of his pipe.

"Well, you couldn't tell a lie—no more than if the parson was there with the Bible and you just going to pop off."

"Do you want to tell a lie?"

"I don't mean that," Yeoman said. "I just don't want to say anything ordinary."

The sails made a continuous noise, the sea growled and hissed, water seethed intermittently along the weather side of the deck, whitish and bubbling, as *Heather Mary* raced into the darkness.

"Jack, you never say anything ordinary. You are the only one I feel able to talk to on the subject I want to talk about. Perhaps that is because you have lost a wife, too."

The wind was getting stronger every moment. There was a crescendo of excitement and strain.

"I wonder if you felt the same," Charrington spoke on thoughtfully. "While Mary was alive she filled my world. I accepted my happiness as one does the sunshine. Then the light went out. I groped desperately. But as I grew calmer I thought that at least I might see her again in imagination. I couldn't, though. In the old days she used to hold that tiller. While I was sailing alone last year I often thought that I could see her. I could for a moment—

but she had no expression. She was only a shadow. I had taken too much for granted while she was alive, not noticed and appreciated. . . . That's why I could not see her clearly when I wanted it most of all. Can you understand that sort of wish?"

"Yes," Yeoman said, disturbed but fascinated.

"I've been particularly interested to hear of how she came to your house after your wife died," Charrington said. "That was while I was a prisoner. She came and looked after you, you said. Didn't your daughter help you?"

"As much as she could, of course. She was in charge of an evacuated school so she couldn't come at once or for long."

"How long did Mary look after you?"

"A week or so—it was at first. But then she used to pop in for quite a while after that."

Yeoman wanted to stop the conversation. There was something wrong which he was not clever enough to put right.

"Hadn't I better unleash the tiller and steer?" he asked.

"Let her steer herself. I want your comments on something."

Charrington reached for the electric torch in the cockpit locker. Then he took a folded sheet of paper from an inside pocket. He smoothed it out, holding it down against his knees. It was a letter.

"I'll read this to you," he said. "You can explain it."

Yeoman glanced at the letter—then shouted, "Look out!" *Heather Mary* had surged up into the wind, straight toward a great mass of white growling water. The wave fell upon her deck like an avalanche. It poured into the cock-



pit and knocked the two men anyhow. They were on their knees, up to their necks in the brimming cockpit, clutching at the life line.

As the water began to drain away, Charrington plunged over to the tiller and began furiously to unlash it.

THE CREW had suffered for what felt much too long from the senseless bustle of the wind and the sullen flogging of the waves. They were exasperated as one is by a headache.

Toby's diary: Yacht went mad. Thrown on deck to shorten sail. Hell of a job. Feeling of being caught in other people's fight. Believe Skipper hadn't expected gale before morning. Never seen him so worked up. But he calmed down when he got the yacht under control again and became, as usual, confident. He sent me and Yeoman below. No chance of sleep, though. Bunk soaked. Galley like tinker's cart galloping on cobbles. Waves being delivered like a ton of coal on deck every half minute. Water sloshing about on deck. Everything wet and squalid below. Front of my jersey sticky with blood from what feels like a broken nose, hair and face with salt. Two hours till dawn. Lord, how I look forward to it!

Toby was writing in his diary when Yeoman, coming into the saloon to look at the barograph, was struck on the head by the swinging lamp. There was a shattering of glass and inky darkness.

"You bloody fool!" Toby shouted.

Yeoman did not answer, but he could be heard trying to sweep up the mess with his sou'wester. This made a splashing as well as a tinkling noise for the bilges were overflowing. In a moment Toby said, "Jack—sorry I was cross. I know you couldn't help it."

"That's all right."

"Jack, why don't we turn downwind? Why do we go on butting through this?"

"We might be driven too close to land. Finisterre juts out."

"What's wrong with land? Nobody wants rocks but surely we could get into some harbor when it's light."

"The Skipper doesn't want to go anywhere near land. Toby, there's something odd about the Skipper. He—"

"Odd! I should damn well think there is. We've known for days there was a storm coming. We could have put into St. Nazaire or Bordeaux or somewhere. It would have made a good

break and there's no hurry. Or he might at least aim at a Spanish port if he's such a good navigator. Not a bit of it. We go blinding out into the middle of the Atlantic where the storms come from and there's no shelter before America."

The hatch slid open, letting in the roar and whistle of the wind, and a voice shouted, "Jack, Toby—on deck!"

It was still dark outside—black dark in the hollows but with a dim view of white breakers when the yacht was on a crest. There was little sense of moving forward. They were rising and falling with violent jerks as an airplane may in a thundercloud.

Charrington had decided they must heave to, facing into the storm now blowing from the northwest. When this had been done *Heather Mary* rode more easily again. But the wind was still rising.

When Toby and Jack were sent below again at last—after an hour—they went straight to their bunks. They climbed into them with their boots and oilskins on. The mattresses squelched under them as they snuggled down, pulling the sticky wet blankets right over their heads. They sighed with relief because they were shut away from intimate contact with the storm. Perhaps it would have ceased before they had to go on deck again.

Log. (Written by Charrington.) 8 a.m. N.W. Force 9. Heavy sea. Barometer still falling. Hove to on port tack.

When Toby opened the hatch to see the daylight, the wet wind struck him on the back of the head, pushing his sou'wester over his eyes. He scrambled out quickly and closed the hatch. Then he looked about him—and his heart prodded his ribs.

The waves may not have been much bigger than they had been during the night. But he could see them now—see the nearest at least. It was as big as a row of houses. It swept forward while the yacht sank down into the gutter. And then the yacht began to nose its way up the side of the wave. It reached the crest and stood there trembling for a moment, giving a view of an infinite number of great waves all galloping along, all gray except for the white splashes, under a low gray moving sky. . . . Then the yacht began to sink down into the next hollow where there was no view—only the walls of boiling water in front and behind.

There was an endless succession of necessary tasks. But the greatest achievement of the morning was that Marcus made a bowl of hot soup. He handed it to each man as he came

below, for it would have gone on the floor if he had put it down.

He finished the soup with Boyd. Boyd was a remarkable sight with tangles of gray hair pulled out like overstrained springs by the wind and his wrinkled face powdered with salt. Marcus, for the first time, had been two days without shaving, and his tired face was smudged with soot. But he tried to be jovial.

"Well, Doctor, how do you feel?"

"Anxious but interested sums it up," Boyd answered, and lapsed into thoughtful silence.

Marcus tried again. "A penny for them—as Richard would say."

"I was thinking about him, as it happens. He has a nice calculation to make."

"What do you mean?" Marcus asked.

"If we keep the sails on her, they'll blow away soon—and maybe the mast as well. If we take them off her, we'll drift with the wind. Blowing as it is at present, that means we'll drift onto the Spanish rocks."

"They are still a long way off."

"Yes, but what will she do without sails? We won't be able to steer her and if she gets beam on—will she roll over, I wonder."

The hatch opened, letting in the storm. Charrington appeared in the doorway. While they were clearing up the mess he stood refilling his pipe. "I'm going to get the sails off her," he said.

"What do you expect will happen then? I have been trying to calculate—" Boyd began.

"There's only one way to find out. Come on deck."

On deck the elements seemed mad, tearing and screaming along, wind and water together. Toby's hat went overboard and his long hair streamed out like black smoke.

It was exhausting work getting the sails down. When the men were kneeling on them, lashing them to the deck, they looked up to see what would happen to the yacht now that there was no means of steering her.

The valleys were deeper and wider than they had been before. A wave higher than the mast was sweeping toward them.

She used to face the waves, plow into them and fight her way up and over. Now as the thing grew in height and swelled toward her, she began to swing away as if afraid. She was almost beam on when she was at the bottom of the valley with the wave

towering over her, its top curled by the wind. She was helpless.

But the wave did not drown her. It heaved her up to its crest. There she remained for a moment, wavering like a toy. Then she sank down into the next deep valley.

She was not fighting any longer. She was passive. She took the shock of wave crests which dropped onto her deck. The wind made a different noise in the empty rigging—a continuous *boo-oo*.

It went on like this all afternoon.

Log. 16 hours. N.N.W. Force 10. Violent squall and shift of wind. Staysail washed overboard. Radio carried away. Glass rising.

Glass rising—that was the thing which mattered! The wind still seemed as strong as ever, but since the storm's center had passed over them it must soon die. There was a limit to it. Charrington gave each of them a tot of rum. They felt it scald their empty stomachs and the fumes rise dizzily into their heads.

Marcus said, "If this is a special occasion, Richard, I hope we don't get many more."

Charrington smiled. "What about some food, Marcus? Bully beef will do."

Marcus tried each of the lockers, but the wood was swollen and he could not open them. Then he found a tin of biscuits and some chocolate in the galley. They ate these sitting with shoulders drooping, staring straight in front of them as tired men do.

"You look worried, Boyd."

"No, Skipper. I was only thinking. The wind has gone round a lot, but not enough. We would still hit the land, drifting like this."

Charrington had filled his pipe and was trying to strike a match to light it. But the damp heads only rubbed off. Toby handed him his lighter.

"Thank you. I know what I'm doing. The wind will veer another point very soon. That will take us clear. Then we'll be finished with this waste of time and can start traveling again."

It happened as he said. Although the sea remained high, the wind veered another point and eased perceptibly before sunset. At midnight the log read: *North 9. Pumped bilges. Unlashed tiller and bore away. Vessel scudding downwind.*

Heather Mary had come alive again. With one man at her tiller while the others slept she raced through the darkness under bare poles.

CHAPTER 6

"LAND—Oh!"

Yeoman had been hoping during half the dawn watch that he might be the one to give that romantic cry. But until the light strengthened he could not be sure that the dark line in front was anything more solid than a cloud.

Marcus, Boyd and Toby came on deck and studied it with shining eyes. The sky was the soft blue of a fine early morning. The wind had dropped and veered another point. The waves were subsiding more slowly. Lacking control, they tumbled about anyhow. *Heather Mary* was still running under bare poles. The western extremity of land lay directly downwind. If it were necessary to sail clear it would take some time to hoist sail.

"Better call the Skipper," Marcus said. He went below.

On deck again, Marcus looked impressed. "Richard won't even get up. We're to leave her as she is. He says of course we'll clear the land."

"We'll see for ourselves in an hour," Boyd said. "That land can't be many miles away."

They waited, watching the land. They knew that there were plenty of jobs to be done, but they were in a convalescent mood and none of them had the energy to start work without orders. There were half a dozen small birds on the deck. They sat with hunched wings, tired and indifferent as the men. They took no notice of the biscuit crumbs which were offered them.

Meanwhile the land loomed nearer. It was an ironbound coast, sheer cliffs and barren hills. When they were still a mile or two away they could see the spray rising high into the air like white smoke. But by that time they knew they would drift clear.

"If Richard had miscalculated—if we had hit that in the night—!" Marcus said.

Toby rubbed his thigh. "I hit something pretty hard. I think it was the anchor."

Marcus laughed. "I'm covered with bruises, too, but lord knows how I got them."

"Preoccupation is a good anesthetic," Boyd said.

"Preoccupation! I don't mind admitting I was scared. Look

here, I don't know about you others, but I had begun to think I knew how to sail. That storm made me realize we'd be helpless without the Skipper. What do you think, Toby?"

"No doubt," Toby said. "I'll see if I can cook some breakfast."

"And I'll try to fix a table to eat it off," Boyd said.

"How do you feel, Jack?" Marcus asked when they were alone.

"I—I'm all right, Colonel."

"You sound a bit strange. What's on your mind?"

Yeoman looked unhappy. Then in a low voice he said, "The Skipper."

"The Skipper?" Marcus repeated, puzzled.

"Colonel, I wouldn't say this to anybody else. But you are second-in-command and I think you ought . . . There's something odd about the Skipper."

"What do you mean?" Marcus asked, his face turning a dark red under the powdering of salt.

Yeoman swallowed, then continued with difficulty. "It's about why he invited us. I'm sure it wasn't just for company or to help him to Bermuda. He's talked to me a lot and just before that squall he had a letter I'd written. He's asked me some funny questions and said some very funny things—"

"What the devil are you talking about?"

"It's about his wife—Miss Heather," Yeoman said.

Marcus looked angrily at him. "Oh. You have been talking to him about his wife. Didn't I specifically warn you not to as soon as we came on board? Don't you wonder he was upset? And you have the impertinence to call him odd—after he brought us through that storm. You ought to be bloody well ashamed."

"Yes, Colonel," Yeoman said, miserably.

After breakfast, at which Charrington joined them—a wonderful breakfast, it seemed—they all came on deck. They set a jib and *Heather Mary* rode the swells more easily.

"Where is Oporto?" Toby asked, looking at the coast.

"Why are you interested?"

"I thought we might be putting in for a night or two. It would be so much easier to straighten up in harbor."

Charrington laughed. "It won't work, Toby. No port wine, no *señoritas*. We've wasted enough time already with that storm. But I promise we will hurry into the next land we see."

The mountains were receding and the land looked less barren.

There were little white houses on the shore, and fishing boats were putting out. The birds that had perched on deck flew away and the men followed them with their eyes. But as the dropping wind still veered, the yacht drew farther from the shore until it was characterless as a low cloud. A liner went by, taking no notice of the little yacht. It vanished to the northward, leaving a smudge of smoke. By afternoon they were alone in a tumbling sea. Bermuda seemed a very, very long way off.

They tidied the deck and patched the sails. "We'll be able to set the mainsail very soon," Charrington said. "Jack, see if the halyards are clear."

Yeoman looked grateful for being given a task. He went to the mast and tugged at the cordage. But it hung tangled as spaghetti on a fork. He climbed the weather shrouds, got a knee over the crosstrees and began work on the tangle. Charrington left the cockpit and climbed up to join him. It was not long before the halyards were clear. But the two men remained standing on the crosstrees, apparently doing some small repair to the burgee. The mast was waving like a signal flag.

Marcus watched, feeling sick and worried. The Skipper should not risk his life like that. But Charrington seemed quite at ease. Marcus could see his lips moving in conversation.

By a roll of the ship no more violent than the others Yeoman was peeled off the mast. He fell like a starfish and splashed into the water. He came to the surface level with the cockpit and clawed at the yacht's side. Marcus reached out to him; but the wash covered him. When next his face appeared, gaping and frightened, he was several yards astern.

Marcus, shouting at the top of his voice, jumped to the life belt and threw it overboard. Yeoman's face appeared once more, then vanished—a long way off. They were racing away from him.

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except the senseless and disordered waves. Charrington was at the helm, the others at the shrouds or in the bow, their eyes darting in every direction.

Suddenly Marcus shouted. Their hopes leaped up. It was the life belt. But there was no sign of Yeoman.

Charrington shouted, "Get to the masthead, somebody."

Toby was the fastest. He was halfway up the rigging before he began to think. Then he became nauseatingly conscious that the mast was flicking like a fly rod. He imagined what had happened to Yeoman but he went on climbing, desperately pulling himself up the wire ladder. He reached the crossrees, got his legs over them and embraced the mast with both arms.

The first thing he did, foolishly, was to look down at the deck where three faces stared up at him from far below, swaying from side to side as if they were suspended on pendulums. For a moment he buried his face in his arms, dizzy and sick. Then he remembered that he had called Jack a bloody fool. He had to find him. His eyes raced up and down over the endless plowed field of water; then began to search with care.

He saw something. He was not sure what. But immediately and instinctively he shouted and let go with one arm to point. Charrington swung the helm over.

Twenty seconds later those on deck had a glimpse of Jack Yeoman, on the crest of a wave. Next moment he had sunk into the trough and they scarcely believed in what they had seen. He had been swimming a conventional breast stroke, an intent and worried expression on his face—just like a bather at Clacton or Southend who has gone a little too far beyond his depth.

They saw him again and it was true. Dear, sturdy old Jack! They would have him aboard in a minute. They glanced at Charrington. He looked troubled. This puzzled them—Jack was so close. . . . And then they understood.

Jack was abeam of them to windward. It was necessary to sail on and then beat up to him on the other tack. By the time they had come about he had vanished.

After an intolerable pause Toby shouted again. Marcus and Boyd, who had climbed halfway up the rigging, saw Yeoman a moment later. He was paddling desperately with his hands and going under every other second, swamped by the waves.

Toby, Marcus and Boyd shouted and pointed. The yacht swung

into the right direction. All three men slid down the rigging, lay flat in the bow or climbed down onto the bobstay to get hold of Yeoman as soon as they should reach him.

By the time they had got into position to grab and pull him up, Yeoman was only about ten yards in front. He was making feeble movements with his hands, and his eyes were goggling. His mouth kept gasping wide—taking in water more often than air. His rescuers worked themselves down and forward, precariously reaching out toward him while the bow of the yacht rose and fell, half blinding them with foam and spray.

Then they realized that the yacht was not heading directly for Yeoman but would pass a yard or more away. They shouted but could not signal—and next moment were abreast of him.

Toby leaned out, touched Yeoman's shoulder, and lost his balance. He would have gone, too, if Marcus had not grabbed his long hair. Meanwhile Yeoman had passed out of their sight along the side of the yacht. Marcus, Boyd and Toby scrambled to their feet, panting, and turned aft—toward Charrington.

Charrington was not there.

The cockpit was empty and the tiller swinging. The stern at that moment was sliding down the steep side of a swell. The unguided yacht had veered up into the wind and slowed almost to a standstill. The sail flapped, as helpless as they were.

The yacht was in the middle of the bowl formed by the double swell. The surface was as smooth as the grass in a salt marsh—except directly astern. Astern there was a commotion as if a shark were fighting on a hook. It was a moment or two before they saw what was really causing it.

Since the yacht had been beating upwind, close-hauled, the bulk of the mainsheet had been on the deck. Now it was trailing taut astern. Richard was at the end of it with Yeoman in his arms.

They got them onto the deck—later, none of them could describe how. Yeoman lay dripping and motionless. Charrington was on his feet at once. He hove to the yacht, then knelt astride the body. Salt water came pumping from Yeoman's open mouth.

The flow ceased. The body grunted, groaned and moved. Charrington and Toby picked Yeoman up and carried him below to the saloon. There Boyd stripped him and wrapped him in the driest blankets they could find while Toby furiously pumped the pressure stove to make a hot drink quickly.

Charrington, who had retired to his cabin, came back in a dressing gown with a bottle in his hand. Toby gave him a cupful of boiling water which he laced golden with whisky. He took Yeoman's head in the crook of his arm and poured the toddy into his mouth. Yeoman spluttered and blinked. He said in a weak voice, "Tell Tilly I'm all right." Then he slipped slowly down onto the settee and went to sleep like a child.

Charrington passed the bottle round. When it came back to him it was half empty. They had needed a drink. They sat down side by side on the other settee and relaxed with the glow of whisky spreading through them like a fireside yawn.

"Tell us what happened, Richard," Marcus said.

"You bloody fools! When he got close I couldn't see him from the tiller—and not one of you signaled. I saw him alongside. So I hitched the mainsheet round me and jumped."

Charrington went to his cabin.

"Where would we be without him?" Marcus murmured.

It was on the tip of Toby's tongue to answer, "On shore." But his annoyance at not putting into port seemed out of proportion now.

BOYD WAS alone in the saloon with Yeoman when he woke up. Jack opened his eyes and stared in a puzzled way at his surroundings. Then he sucked his lips in and spoke awkwardly.

"I fell overboard, I'm sorry."

"It might happen to anybody at the top of a swaying mast."

They were silent for a while.

Like a candle lighted in a cottage window, a thought appeared in Yeoman's sleepy eyes. He looked at the two closed doors, then asked in a low voice, "Where's the Colonel?"

"Making his inventory in your cabin. Do you want him?"

"No! He said I shouldn't have talked to the Skipper about Miss Heather."

"Did you?" Boyd asked.

"Not till he started. Then I just said what was natural. She was very good to me, you know, after my own wife passed away."

Boyd waited.

"It's not his talking about her that's odd, though. It's the things he says and the questions he asks. He wants to know every little thing about when she came to look after me when I was left

alone—what we talked about, how we got on, even what room she slept in. You'd think he was jealous, if that wasn't absurd."

"Wishing to hear of the kind acts of a lost wife isn't necessarily jealousy," Boyd said.

"No—but, Doctor, he had a letter I'd written to her. He was going to ask me about it, I think. But it was washed overboard at the beginning of the storm."

Boyd looked thoughtfully at the honest, worried and tired face. "Listen, Jack," he said. "Let us stick to what we know for certain. The Skipper suffered a great shock at the death of his wife and hasn't got over it even yet. We have that from Marcus. Mrs. Harding, who knows the Skipper well, wanted Marcus to come on this trip to look after him. From what I happen to know of their marriage, Charrington and his wife were in love but didn't hit it off somehow. They talked on different wave lengths. It seems to me perfectly natural that he should want to hear about her from us. There is nothing to be disturbed about in it."

"But I am disturbed," Yeoman said.

"Don't forget he has just taken a big risk to save your life."

Yeoman looked again at the closed doors of the saloon, then whispered, "You don't know what he said when he got hold of me in the water. He gripped onto me so it hurt and I'd swear he said, 'You can't escape like that.'"

The door suddenly opened and Charrington was in the saloon.

"Hello, Jack. You're awake. Why are you looking so bothered?"

Yeoman stared up at him with tight-closed lips and bulging eyes.

"He's lost his teeth," Boyd said. "And they were such a lovely set."

"He doesn't look so handsome, does he?" Charrington laughed.

ANOTHER INCIDENT which, to a certain extent, bore on the same subject happened two days later.

Marcus was completing his inventory of stores and Charrington had invited him to check what was stowed in his cabin when his list was otherwise complete. When Harding knocked on the cabin door, a warm friendly voice told him to come in.

Charrington was lying on his bunk with a book in his hands. He put it down and sat up—careful not to bump his head.

"Come in, Marcus. What do you think of my cabin?"

Marcus stood in the small floor space and looked around. It was strictly tidy, as one would expect. Marcus wondered why Richard had made such a mystery of it.

"It's very snug."

Charrington pushed out of the bunk and jumped to the floor. In so doing he disclosed part of the bookshelf. On it, in a leather traveling frame, was a photograph of Heather Mary.

It was a snapshot. She was dressed in trousers and a jersey, her hands in her pockets, leaning forward with a question in her face, her hair blowing. Marcus's eyes were held by the eyes of the photograph. He remembered her looking exactly like that.

"What's interesting you?" Charrington asked.

Marcus started. "I was—well, I was admiring the cabin."

"Neat, isn't it," Charrington said. "Behind you is the chart table. It's where the other bunk used to be. It folds down like this—" He pulled down a panel, making it into a table with a chart of the Portuguese coast on it. "Here we are. Tomorrow we bear off to the westward to pass Madeira and reach the Trades."

"Yes," Marcus said. He had been trying hard to pull himself together in the barrage of Charrington's words. "But you know, Richard, I came down here to check your stores."

"You needn't bother. I find I have a list. Here it is, food and water. It completes your inventory. So you have nothing more to do now than help me to keep people cheerful on the long crossing. What shall we have for dinner tonight?"

Marcus left the cabin, half elated and half ashamed. He had a grand leader and it was his own clear duty as second-in-command to pass on the Skipper's enthusiasm. He was half ashamed, though, of his sin of omission in denying notice of Heather's photograph. What else could he have done? But he had an uncomfortable feeling that he had put himself in a false position.

It was the dawn watch of one of these uncertain days while they still waited for the Trades. The yacht was scudding south-westward before a fresh northerly breeze and Boyd and Charrington were together in the cockpit while the others slept, when a bluish-purple hump gradually took shape on the horizon to port.

Charrington had his back to it. Boyd, sitting opposite him, was silent until he was certain that what he saw was land, not cloud. Then he said, "That's Madeira, I suppose."

Charrington turned. "Yes," he said. "I had hoped to pass it during the night."

"Shall we put in?"

"No."

There was a pause. Then Boyd in his quiet voice said, "May I ask why not?"

"We have enough food and water. No spars went in that storm. We lost a couple of sails but we can do without. You have got the charging engine running again yourself. There is no justification whatever for putting into port."

"Then why not put in just for the pleasure of it?"

"What pleasure?" Charrington asked.

"To be able to walk more than five paces in one direction and on something solid and stationary—to wash in fresh water—to eat a meal cooked, served and cleared away by someone else—"

"Does that sort of thing mean so much to you?"

"No more than I believe it does to you. I'm not complaining. But it would only add a day or two to the voyage. Therefore I wonder why you are determined to deny it to yourself—and us."

"Did the others put you up to this?" Charrington asked.

Boyd looked blank and then his eyes opened wider.

"Surely we can talk to each other like intelligent beings," he said.

Charrington put a hand on Boyd's shoulder. "Forgive me. I'm on edge. I have not made up on my sleep since that storm."

"Isn't that another reason for putting in?" Boyd asked.

Charrington shook his head. "If one's primary object is to get across the Atlantic, there is no justification for putting into harbor. If we dropped anchor in Funchal, the odds would be against our ever reaching Bermuda. I can't explain that logically but it's a fact. And I assure you I'm now speaking as one intelligent being to another. Listen. In the ports of Madeira, and the Canaries too, I dare say, certainly in Gibraltar, you'd find yachts that put in to rest and refit for a few days—perhaps a year ago. They may go home but they'll never go on."

"But why?" Boyd said.

"You will have to accept my word. I am certain that if we rested in Funchal, Marcus would cable home and hear that one of his kids was ill and he must take a plane at once. Jack Yeoman would get homesick or discover his vocation was to grow vines.

And Toby would fall in love or decide to return to the girl he left behind him. You would stay: I'm sure of you. But any of the others might desert for one good reason or another."

"It interests me," Boyd said, "that you can be worried at the possibility of somebody's leaving the yacht. I'd have thought you were the last person to depend on a pressed crew."

"Good God!" Charrington exclaimed. "I would sail her round the world without any crew at all."

"Exactly—"

"But that's not the point," Charrington said, calmly again. "We set out on this passage together and we will finish it together."

Toby's long untidy hair and his thin bored intelligent face appeared through the hatch. He ignored the men in the cockpit but turned slowly round, examining the horizon. . . . At the top of his voice he shouted, "Land! Bloody good land."

He swung back to the cockpit. "Didn't you see it?" Without waiting for an answer he turned, ducked his head into the companionway and yelled, "Land—Madeira! Come and see it, you sleepy baskets!"

Marcus and Yeoman sprouted up beside him. They stared where he pointed, shading their eyes from the sun. They shouted with excitement. Then for the first time they looked at the two faces in the cockpit and were immediately sobered.

"Aren't we going to put in, Richard?" Marcus asked.

"No. It's off our course."

"But you said we'd hurry in to the next land we saw," Toby said.

"I didn't expect this visibility. I meant Bermuda. We'll hurry on to that. It would be neither good policy nor good seamanship to put in now. You must take my word for that."

"If we are in such a hurry to reach Bermuda," Toby said, "why do we go by this roundabout route?"

"Because it is the best. You will understand that when we are fairly into the Trades. Nor is it roundabout, as you'd appreciate if you studied it on a globe. Look here, I don't often exert my authority as skipper, but when I do I expect my decisions to be accepted without any damned argument."

"Of course we accept your decision," Marcus said.

But Boyd had a different reaction. He was not entirely happy

about the spirit of the voyage. That was why he wanted a day or two ashore—to take stock under more normal conditions. That had been refused. So it seemed wise to put his anxieties to the test in public while it was still possible to halt the voyage.

"I don't mean to be impertinent," he said. "But before that land drops under the horizon we ought to be told frankly how we stand. You told me just now that a skipper cannot trust a crew ashore before starting across the Atlantic. Do you really consider us a crew of that sort? In that case why did you invite four men you hardly knew? Do you regret your choice?"

"Why did I invite you? Not for your skill as sailors. None of you can navigate. You know very little about trimming the sails as I discover every time I come on deck. And although you have been through one moderate storm I doubt if you would feel competent to face another on your own."

"You never taught us anything," Toby said.

"No. This isn't a training ship. You are strong, and I thought you were willing—which was all I asked for as far as sailing was concerned."

"So you are satisfied," Boyd said.

"Perfectly. As I told you on the first day, I wanted company. I never had many intimate friends of my own. Most of that few were killed in the war. None of the rest could get away for so long. So I searched among my wife's friends. I discovered you four, who accepted. Personally I have never regretted it."

No one said anything, and after a moment Charrington went on. "I'll tell you one reason why I haven't regretted it. I had the richest, happiest married life for three years before the war. In your different ways you must each have known Mary well enough to realize the fascination there was in being the husband of such an intricate, fairylike creature. . . . Then the damned old war came. We are being frank: I must admit that I enjoyed bits of it while my innings lasted. But it complicated married life. And then I was locked up, or a fugitive, for over four years. We wrote to each other, of course. But you can't expect a spirit of the mountains and the sea to express itself in censored letters. I tried for over four years to escape and return to her. Finally—by the last means I could have expected—I was successful. But before we could come together she had vanished. I am glad of companions who can help me fill in the gap."

Boyd said urgently, "Skipper, if your whole crew asked you to put into Madeira just for a day or two—wouldn't you do it?"

Charrington lit his pipe, then said, "With the best will in the world I couldn't do that now. You see those little hurrying clouds? They are Trade Wind clouds. And this wind astern is a steady Force Five that won't change much. Even I couldn't get you back against it. We are in the One Way Street."

CHAPTER 7

THEY HAD fallen into a Trade Winds routine. For two weeks there was nothing more distracting than the occasional rain squalls—which they looked forward to as the only opportunity for a fresh-water wash. The wind still blew—but only with sufficient strength to make the heat bearable and to fill the sails. The tiller no longer jumped and tugged under the steersman's hand: it lay there quietly. They no longer heard the groan of blocks and grunt of hard-strained rope. The surface over which the yacht moved so prettily was scarcely more than rippled. Except for the clouds, a swooping bird or the flash of a small breaking wave here and there, *Heather Mary* was the only white thing in the great circle of vivid blue. Time moved on, as the yacht did, without anything to measure it against.

SINCE TAKING over the watch at midnight, Marcus had been at the tiller for half an hour when Charrington came up and joined him. This was a custom which had developed from the stormy period. Now they could sit at ease, smoking and talking—not that they talked much. But in their silences as much as in their conversation he felt that a personal companionship—quite apart from the link which Meg made—was growing up between them.

On this occasion Charrington asked, "Catch anything today?"

"No," Marcus answered.

"Lots of sailors will tell you fish don't take bait in deep water."

"I don't believe that. They must feed, and they can't know it's bait or they wouldn't take it even in shore water."

There was a long pause. Then Charrington remarked, "You are an expert fisherman, I gather."

"My dear Richard, I've never tried this sort before. And I'm a

pretty average tyro with a trout rod. It's just I like the peace of it and thinking my own thoughts and that."

There was another silence.

Charrington said at last, "Meg is good, isn't she?"

"Expert—and keen as mustard . . . Good old Meg."

"Good old Meg," Charrington repeated. Then, confidentially, "You get on well together, don't you?"

"Of course. Why do you ask?"

"Only that during the war you were so little together, and then two years in the East. Well, it seems odd she should encourage you to go off like this as soon as you get back."

Marcus muttered, "She always likes me to do what I want." He felt that Richard wasn't quite convinced, but obviously he could not repeat Meg's "Look after Richard." So he said no more.

Later, when Boyd had relieved him, he went to the galley to brew coffee. While the water heated he found himself picturing their arrival in Bermuda. They would anchor among spick-and-span racing yachts and men in spotless white would hail them asking where they were from.

"Brixham."

"Not Brixham, England?"

"Yes."

Meg and the brats would come out in a motor launch—how excited those two little ragamuffins would be, and how thrilled to be shown over the yacht!

The coffee bubbled. Marcus took a cup to Boyd in the cockpit.

"How long has Richard been below?" he asked.

"He went just after you did."

"I was wondering if I should take him a cup. Do you think he's asleep?"

"His light is still on. But coffee isn't the best thing for bad sleepers."

"How do you know he's a bad sleeper?"

"He told me so—a result of his escaping days. He got the day and night habits reversed and hasn't righted them. He hardly ever turns his light out. I offered him some sleeping tablets—"

"You don't use sleeping tablets?"

"I haven't needed them—any more than my seasick pills. But the Skipper wouldn't have them."

"Oh, well," Marcus said. "I'd better not take him any coffee."

He went below and lay on his bunk. Turning out the light he tried to recapture his imaginings.

After dinner he would walk with Meg to their bungalow, through the soft night. He would ask her what had been in her mind when she told him to look after Richard. He would describe Richard's strange excitement and how he had dealt with it. She would congratulate him on being a good second-in-command.

Then, without conscious transition and without surprise, Marcus was standing by a Highland burn. His body was swaying forward and back as he cast a fly. Heather was beside him, her big oilskin hat thrown back upon her shoulders, the chin tape round her throat, her face eager and bright. She was talking to him, her voice like hurrying water. . . . What made it so satisfactory was that she would be with him all the voyage. Meg wouldn't mind—even if she knew. Richard wouldn't know, either. It was perfectly innocent, but there were things one didn't talk about.

Marcus fell asleep, smiling.

TOBY WAS sitting on his bunk, writing by electric light.

The Skipper says we are more than halfway between Spain and Bermuda. One accepts that, of course—one has to. But, myself, I appreciate the meaning no better than I did as a child when an adult told me I was halfway to manhood. I only feel that we are driving farther and farther into the middle of the ocean.

People say that adventuring in the lonely places of the world makes you feel humble and unimportant. Nonsense—just the reverse. In London you don't expect God to notice or hear your prayers because of the bustle and row and church-bell ringing that everybody else is creating. But here—if God is watching the world even casually, He can't have failed to see the little yacht in the middle of the Atlantic. When I am alone at the tiller on a calm night I feel as if there is nothing separating me and God. Whatever I say He'll hear. That isn't blasphemy, it's common sense.

And if that is common sense, it becomes quite reasonable to talk to a person who is dead. I ask her why she did not obey the unmistakable sign that we were meant for each other. I ask why she did not even answer my letters, but traveled into the west and dropped into the sea.

Her answers are indistinct but I'm certain she is not far off. In the sea perhaps, but near. I can't explain, but I'm quite sure about it.

"Toby," Yeoman called from the hatch, "it's your watch."
"All right, I'm just coming."

TWO HOURS later Boyd relieved Toby and found Charrington on deck. When Toby had gone below they sat for some time without speaking while *Heather Mary* glided swiftly over the dark and placid water with a noise like rustling silk.

Then Charrington said: "Toby and I have been having a philosophical discussion."

"Based on what?" Boyd asked.

"Microcosms. Toby was comparing the yacht with the heavenly bodies. According to him she is another inhabited planet, slightly nearer to the earth than Mars is, but not much."

"Yes," Boyd said.

"I suggested that she was more comparable to the universe, with each of us representing a separate world. We work to the same rules but haven't much idea what goes on in each other's mind. You and I, for instance, are as different as we could be. I'm inquisitive and violent in my reactions—and nobody ever tells me anything. You don't care. No, that's not right—you seem interested but I don't believe you would ever be surprised. Therefore people confide in you. Isn't that true?"

"I do get confided in—unfortunately," Boyd said.

"Why unfortunately?"

"When people confide they generally want advice."

"I don't want advice," Charrington said. "But I would like you to tell me something. Will you?"

"If I can."

"You know that when I finally got back from Germany I called my wife in America. I heard nothing from her directly, but the Foreign Office told me she was coming back on the *Prince Rupert*. I realized that Mary must have dropped everything and started immediately when she got my cable. Can you realize how happy I was? I managed to discover where she was docking and went to meet her. . . . Mary did not come off the ship. Everybody was busy and it was some time before I found out why."

Boyd felt deeply sorry for Charrington. But what could he say

to comfort him? He waited with anxiety for the form that his question would take.

"In war one learns to accept the danger of bombers and U-boats," Charrington said. "But to be lost like that! How did it happen? Why did it happen? Was it some extraordinary accident or—I have been driving myself half crazy ever since through puzzling about that. You got to know her on the *Prince Rupert*. You saw her often. Tell me, was she happy?"

Boyd hesitated, but not for long, for Charrington's eyes were fixed urgently and impatiently upon him. "I noticed her as soon as she came on board because she looked so happy," he said.

Charrington's intent expression gradually changed. He climbed out of the cockpit and walked to the bow. He stood there for some time, staring over the dark water. Then he turned and came slowly aft again. Without even looking at Boyd he went below.

Boyd did not feel pleased with himself. To tell only part of the truth was as bad as to lie. And yet—why cause pain if it can be avoided? Heather would not have wanted that, surely. She had suggested that he might "help" her husband. But had he, by that answer, driven out Charrington's devil? The last glimpse of his face as he went below made Boyd doubtful.

Heather—looking at the water sliding away astern, he recalled that part of her story which he had not told to her husband.

HEATHER, in the stern of the *Prince Rupert*, had described only a few incidents of her stay in America. Probably, Boyd thought, nothing else had impressed itself on her tired mind. For she had been doubly strained before she sailed, by her work and by her private worries.

At the back of her mind she had hoped to escape her problem, at least for a little while, by crossing the Atlantic Ocean. But it caught up with her when she woke in the ship on the last night of the voyage. For a moment she thought that Richard was in the bunk above her. Then she became convinced that he would meet her on the quay. She lay trembling while the ship rushed her through the dark water.

When daylight came, she was no longer haunted by these fancies but much worried that she had experienced them so vividly and with such fear. She believed her brain to be logical and straightforward. What did it mean—that a sort of fifth column in

her mind was trying to avoid meeting Richard again and facing the struggle of wills this would entail? She didn't want that. The sooner the struggle was over the better. But—but first she must find an opportunity to rally her strength.

She did not find it in Washington. The work was hard and the recreation harder. She realized that her health was failing and became frightened, because it was essential she should be well. No doubt this extra anxiety hastened her collapse.

She gave no description of her illness. Nature, Boyd thought, has her own anesthetic and those who have suffered from a nervous breakdown may be saved all the memory of it. What Heather next spoke of was her convalescence. It was spent in a series of visits to an ever-increasing chain of new friends.

"The war will soon be over. Then your man will come back to you." They all said something like that.

One evening she managed to escape for a walk by herself. Without thinking where she was going she wandered into the poorest quarter of town. She was passing a saloon when she stopped in her tracks. Somebody inside, with a fine sensitive voice, was asking her—

*"Will ye no come back again?
Better lo'ed ye canna' be . . ."*

Here was a person from her own land! Without hesitation she pushed open the door and walked into the saloon.

The room was shabby, crowded, and vague with smoke. Some of the men stopped talking and fixed their eyes on Heather. She ignored them. She was looking for the singer. She saw him in a corner, leaning against the wall with his white teeth flashing as he sang, as oblivious of the company as she was herself. . . . He was a Negro.

For a moment she remained staring and bewildered. Then she turned and walked quickly out. All the way back the words and the singer haunted her. And gradually the shocked disappointment she had experienced at not finding a fellow countryman gave place to a mood of exhilaration. She had received a message. The strange way in which it had come to her accentuated its importance as if it had been in a secret code. The meaning was plain.

She must go home. How simple! A month, even a week or two

at Amulree, and she would be herself again, ready to face Richard calmly and with assurance.

There was no difficulty about obtaining permission—she was on indefinite leave—and it was arranged that she should sail for England on the *Prince Rupert* which would leave for England via Bermuda in a fortnight's time.

Those two weeks were for Heather a period of daydreaming. She lived in a state of trembling excitement, scarcely believing in the arrangements which were going forward so smoothly, frightened that something would go wrong. Not until the ship sailed did she breathe free and deep.

It was then that Boyd had seen her—and smiled with appreciation. She was so pretty and so happy. Her body seemed almost too frail to face the breeze which was blowing from the open Atlantic, but her eyes appeared to see something better than this world. He supposed that she was going to meet somebody she loved. He would have liked very much to speak to her.

An hour later, going into dinner, he saw an empty chair at the table where she was sitting, and on the impulse sat down there. They began to talk immediately. Boyd had been in Washington and they discovered acquaintances in common. After the meal they strolled together on the blacked-out deck. Often during the next two days they walked or watched the sea together. They were as much at ease in each other's company as lifelong friends. He was touched by the way she called him Peter. He had always been Boyd since he ceased to have a family.

He was perfectly happy merely looking at her, listening to her rapid, rather breathless speech as she poured out her heart. He learned that she was returning not to a person but to a place she loved. She told him about Amulree and her childhood there.

The liner made a brief call at Bermuda. When they were at sea again, watching the low-lying islands fade into the blue, the signals officer handed Heather a cable relayed from Washington. She took it, smiling her thanks.

Then she glanced at the message and all the animation drained from her face, leaving it white and blank as a mask. The message slipped from her hand and drifted into the sea. She grasped the rail with both hands—a sick and frightened child.

"Peter," she said, "will we call anywhere else before England?"

"No," Boyd told her.

"If I gave the captain a thousand pounds, would he put back to Bermuda?"

"I'm afraid not." He smiled at her. "But why do you want him to? Is there anything I can do?"

She shook her head. "If it had come two hours earlier, when we were at Bermuda, I could have waited for another ship. I'd have had time. I wouldn't have minded then."

He did not question her. They began to walk slowly up and down the deck, she clinging to his arm. He persuaded her to let him take her down to dinner. And there he was proud of her, for she talked as usual and no one could have guessed from her face what she was feeling. Afterward they returned to the deck and leaned over the stern, watching the sunset.

"You are the easiest person to talk to I ever knew," Heather said. "You're a stranger for one thing and we'll never meet again. . . ."

IT WAS very late when Heather finished her story. She turned to Boyd and asked: "Peter, what shall I do?"

Often since then Boyd had wondered what he would have answered. But she gave him no time.

"No, no, I must not ask advice. It's too big a responsibility to put to anyone."

"I want to help you if I can," Boyd said.

"You have helped me. You can't know how much you've helped. It's all so much clearer. I can see . . ."

She was staring down over the rail.



"I think you had better go to bed now," Boyd said.

"No. I want to go on looking at the water, and listening to it. . . . Peter, I wish Richard knew you. If you want to help me, will you get to know him? I don't want you to do anything special, but he will need a person who is calm and wise."

"I will do what I can. Let me take you to your cabin now."

He took her arm and led her unresisting through the blacked-out ship where none was awake except the watch. He took her to her cabin and went to his own.

At the court of inquiry the woman in the next cabin stated that she had awakened and heard Mrs. Charrington's door open and close at about half past four. Boyd said only that he had taken her to her cabin at three o'clock. He did not feel justified in telling any more. It was known that she had recently suffered a nervous breakdown. The Captain was content to approve the evidence and record in the log, *Lost overboard and presumably drowned.*

The tiller pressed gently against Boyd's side rousing him from his memories. He glanced at the binnacle to make sure the yacht was still on her course. Then, looking forward, he noticed the light still glowing through the skylight of the Skipper's cabin.

He felt a wave of sympathy for that lonely man. He had an idea. He would be relieved by Marcus very soon. Why not take a cup of cocoa to the Skipper? That would not keep him awake, and even if he did not want the drink he might recognize the friendly intention. . . . But suppose he had fallen asleep with the light on. That would spoil the gesture!

Boyd left the tiller and leaned out of the forward side of the cockpit. He could not see through the opaque glass of the skylight, but both sides had been lifted, like the two halves of a cucumber frame, to let in as much air as possible. With his head close to the deck, Boyd looked through the six-inch aperture on the port side.

From there he could see the bunk, and that Charrington was not in it. Slightly surprised, he moved to the starboard side. He saw Charrington's broad and naked back as he leaned over his chart table. The big chart in front of him must be of the Atlantic, for on its eastern side the coasts of Spain and Morocco were indicated. But nothing else caught Boyd's eye except for a penciled X in a red circle somewhere out in the ocean.

Suddenly interested, Boyd looked with care. Did the X mark their position? Charrington's elbows hid the American coast, so



it was difficult to get one's bearings. But it did not seem right—too far across.

The yacht, left to herself, had swung off course. As the wind took her almost abeam, she rolled. Charrington looked up. His face clouded. He caught sight of Boyd and shouted furiously:

"What the devil are you doing? Get back to your job."

BOYD WAS on watch again from six till eight. Generally, he spent a good proportion of these two hours thinking about breakfast. But on this occasion he was preoccupied. His precise mind insisted that he must find out the significance of that cross on the chart. But he did not want to provoke Charrington any further.

When Yeoman relieved him, he went below and found them all at their porridge. He helped himself from the saucepan in the galley, and sat down. He chose his moment.

"Sorry to have peeped in at you like that, Skipper," he said. "I wanted to see if you were awake before bringing you some cocoa."

"That's all right, Boyd. But if you want to call on me I'd rather you did it by the door. Having been a prisoner makes one jumpy."

"I'm sorry."

"That's all right. I'm sorry I swore at you."

Charrington finished his porridge and reached for the tea. Boyd hesitated how to put his question.

Charrington looked up at him and asked: "Did you see any marks on the chart?"

"Yes, a cross—"

"Damn. I hoped you hadn't."

"Why?"

"Do you remember when I threw that bottle of gin overboard and said we wouldn't drink the stuff except on special occasions? I'd decided that when we reached that Point X we'd have a party. But I meant it to be a surprise."

"I see. But why should your Point X mark a special occasion? It wasn't placed in any particular spot as far as I could see."

Charrington laughed. "You've discovered half my secret. You must not ask me to tell you the rest. You know there is going to be a party but I can still surprise you with when and where it is going to take place."

EVERYTHING on board continued in the old routine and the log ticked off a hundred miles a day. But several things which seemed dramatic happened. First the boom swung over from the port to the starboard side. They had been so long in the belt of the Trade Winds, and here was proof they had come out on the other side of it at last. They were bearing up into the North Atlantic.

The next event was that they passed an acre of yellow seaweed—a startling color in that world of blue.

"Sargasso weed," Charrington said.

Yeoman's round face lighted up at once. "Are we going to sail through the Sargasso Sea? I've read about that. It's a big whirlpool—isn't it?—where there's nothing except seaweed and strange monsters and wrecks."

Charrington punched him on the shoulder. "You're perfect, Jack. The Sargasso was debunked by the Michael Sars expedition, but you are quite right that it's an empty quarter. We must cut through it to get back to the steamship routes and Bermuda."

While they sailed on northward, with a fresh breeze on their quarter, the ocean heaved with an unusually big swell, and the northern sky at night was splashed with distant lightning.

Charrington said: "The barometer is playing funny tricks. The weather can break up at this time of year, patches of storms everywhere."

"I don't care where the storms are so long as they aren't here," Marcus said.

Left alone at the helm, Toby thought: It is strangely impressive to feel the heave of a storm yet little or nothing of the wind that causes it. I remember the same sort of thing when we were on the other side. It is another instance of the vastness and homogeneity of the ocean. But thank God we are moving fast enough. Before long we might even see something other than water.

That was worth writing down. He opened the cockpit locker to take out his notebook. But it was not there.

CHAPTER 8

IT WAS almost dawn before the storm arrived. Those below heard a rattling of the blocks and shrouds as the wind rushed up from a new quarter. Those on deck saw the dark water stippled by white waves, felt the sudden strength of the tiller and heard the strain and whine of the rigging. Another storm—they all knew what that meant, a damned nuisance.

With the help of the watch on deck Charrington shortened sail and settled the yacht as nearly on her course as the headwind allowed. Everything movable had already been secured and the hatch covers lashed in place. There was nothing more to do.

Morning showed a gray, unfriendly scene. The choppy seas were the color of lead. The air, full of spray and rain, was blowing by like smoke, hiding the sky.

All day it was the same—the barometer was dropping slowly, promising nothing spectacular but equally no change in the present squalor and discomfort. They knew too well what the coming

night would be like. During the dogwatch they were all together in the cockpit, silent and depressed.

"Tonight the yacht can sail herself," Charrington suddenly announced. "We'll all go below and have a good dinner. No steamships ever come hereabouts."

He lashed the tiller and led the way into the saloon. He put gin and sherry on the table and then shut himself in the galley.

"This is exactly like our first night on board," Marcus said.

The slow smile came into Boyd's eyes. "Not exactly. The tiller was not lashed then and we had not heard of Point X. I suppose it is our arrival there that we are to celebrate."

"If Point X stands for one of Richard's special dinners I don't see what anybody is grouching about."

"Nobody is grouching, Marcus," Boyd said.

"But you've got something on your mind," Marcus persisted.

Boyd looked thoughtfully at the galley door through which came the roar of the pressure stoves. "We are nowhere in particular. Why should Point X be here?" he asked.

At that moment the galley door opened and Charrington came in with a steaming frying pan.

The meal which followed had a remarkable effect. It completely changed their mood. They had expected "a good dinner." What they were given was something far above the average by any standard. First there was an omelet from eggs which Charrington had concealed and preserved until now, then dolphin steaks cooked in wine, and finally a fruit salad with fresh apples and oranges in it—another surprise. With the food they drank champagne and after it a very good Madeira. The totally unexpected touches were exciting: the trouble which had been taken was complimentary. At the back of all their minds had lingered the resentment caused by the Skipper's refusal to put into port before crossing the Atlantic. Suddenly the perfect host was offering them as good a meal as they could have bought in the best hotel. Let the storm blow—it only heightened their appreciation.

"You know, Skipper," Toby said, trying to hold his glass in front of the swaying lamp, "it's a lovely color, Madeira."

"The sailor's wine," Charrington said. "The only wine except sherry that is improved by rough voyages."

"They always used to carry their barrel, didn't they, Skipper?" Yeoman broke in. "The old trading captains, I mean. They said

it was better for the tropics and a few storms and sea battles."

"I know I'm better for this voyage," Marcus said. "If you had told me two months ago that I'd enjoy dinner on a boat tossing like this, I'd have called you a liar. But here I am. . . ."

Boyd's eyes were shining with appreciation. He realized that all of them were a little tipsy, and he wondered why, for the amount they had drunk did not account for it. Presumably it was reaction, after the long weeks of monotonous strain—healthy and hungry bodies suddenly satisfied, minds which had expected another weary night startled by companionship and pleasure. How charming the Skipper could be when he wanted.

"Mary liked it best when it was rough," Charrington said.

Suddenly everyone was quiet. Charrington filled the glasses, recorked the bottle and put it carefully between the cushions on the divan. He went on speaking without apparently noticing any difference in the atmosphere.

"When it was windy—and I was steering, of course—she used to go up to the bow and sit there with her hair streaming back. I used to tell her she was acting the figurehead. The old sailing ships we've been talking about, if they had women's names, generally had figureheads. I expect the tough sailors idealized them as their loves. . . . You have a habit of sitting in the bow when there's a breeze, haven't you, Toby?"

Charrington sipped his wine, looking round the saloon at the suddenly startled faces.

"She didn't do that when it was calm," he went on. "Then she used to climb the mast—to look over the horizon, I supposed. Did you see over the horizon, Jack, before you fell? Or, more often, she'd sit in the stern against the mizzenmast—just as you have been doing, Marcus. But she wasn't fishing. It fascinated her to watch the water flowing by. That's right, isn't it, Boyd? . . . You have each played your part in reminding me of her."

Outside there was a continuous surge and boom as *Heather Mary* drove forward. In the saloon it was quiet as a storm center.

Marcus cleared his throat. "What are you getting at, Richard?"

"Getting at? I was about to ask you to drink to Mary's memory."

"Of course we'll do that." Marcus tried to rise, but a sudden movement of the yacht threw him back onto his seat again and spilled half his wine.

"We drink sitting—even to kings and to toy princesses,"

Charrington said. "Heather Mary Charrington!" He raised his glass and the others did the same.

A minute or two later—they all remaining silent—the Skipper asked, "Well, who is going to reply?"

"What do you mean, Richard?"

"Reply to the toast, of course."

"I think *Heather Mary* is doing that," Boyd said quietly. "We would be better employed attending to her on deck."

"Don't shirk the issue. You each have something to say. You helped to fill the cup with—that's what I want to know!"

"Look here, Richard," Marcus broke in, "you've given us a good dinner. Don't let's get philosophical or something now."

Charrington turned on him. "Philosophical? It's facts I want. Don't pretend you can't understand. It is two and a half years ago that Mary died. But you know that, of course. What you may not know is that within a few hours we shall be sailing through the very water in which she is buried."

"You told us just now that no ships ever used this part of the Atlantic," Toby said.

"Liners did not keep to the shipping lanes in wartime. In this case *Prince Rupert* went south. I searched out the Captain. He could show me his course exactly. The only thing he did not know was when it was during the night that the thing happened. One of you could have told me that but—never mind. Tomorrow at latest we shall reach her grave. There is no more time for evasions. You shall each tell your part of the story tonight."

Charrington paused, his flushed, bearded face thrust forward.

"I suppose you mean that you want us to talk about Heather," Boyd said wearily. "We all knew her and were fond of her. Isn't that enough? Can't you let her rest—if there is any rest in the sea."

Charrington looked at him.

"I had already realized that you would prefer everything to be buried," he said. "But you left one or two things aboveground."

"What the devil—"

"Steady, Boyd," Marcus said quickly. "Look here, Richard, for heaven's sake don't let's quarrel now—or talk about anything serious for that matter. We are all too tired and on edge. You can't have had a proper night's sleep for weeks."

There was a crash of water and a shrill scream of wind. The yacht checked, shivered, then leaned right over and began to

gather speed again—faster and faster, jumping the waves or boring through them.

"Would it not be wise for some of us to go on deck?" Boyd asked.

"The vessel can look after herself," Charrington answered. "I am not quarreling, as Marcus suggests. I am only asking for a clear statement—which was your own request on the other side of the Atlantic. Then I told you frankly why you had been invited—to show me some lost pages of my married life. Have you? I have spoken to each of you alone and in confidence. All I got were evasions, silences, attempts to change the subject—"

"Good lord, Richard, you talk as if we had something to conceal."

"Haven't you? What else can I think? Boyd, you're a scientist; isn't that the logical deduction?"

"All I know, Skipper, is that we would be better either on deck or in our bunks. Can't we leave this till the morning?"

"Then we shall have reached the place. Are you or are you not going to make a clean breast of your relations with my wife?"

"Since you put it like that I am not going to utter a single bloody word," Toby said.

Charrington swallowed his wine and put the glass down beside the others which seesawed up and down, up and down continually on the swinging table. His face was red and his dark eyes had become small. "Very well, I shall tell you the story myself," he said. "You will of course correct me if I am wrong. . . ."

He began a description of his married life, repeating much of what he had said before, making an idyl of it. Boyd thought of the struggle to the death of personalities which he had glimpsed from Heather Mary's story. But he kept silent. Since Charrington could not be deflected, it was probably best to let him talk on unopposed. He appeared to be calmed by the roseate picture he was painting. He was oblivious of the creaks and yearnings of the hard-pressed yacht and the threatening howl of wind and water.

He refilled the wineglasses, and talked about his war service. Death or glory, and brief but intoxicatingly happy leaves were the impressions he gave. Although he had the knack of description, it was obvious that he was exaggerating. Was he trying to compensate himself for the briefness of his active war? That was harmless enough. But they all wished he would finish talking and

go on deck to ease the yacht. She trembled at each blow of water and the noise of the wind was a continuous howl.

"Then I was captured—in a damn-fool way. They got my ship, too. They came on board and fixed a line and towed her away," Charrington said. "Everything went wrong. I expect you wonder why I've gone through all this. You had to have it as a background to the story you would not tell yourselves.

"I did two things as a prisoner—three if you like. I tried to get back to my wife, I wrote letters to her and waited for her replies. I told you off Madeira that one couldn't expect a creature like Mary to express her true feelings in censored letters. Until that time, that had been my explanation of the coolness and superficiality of her replies. But while you on our night watches together have been evading my questions and thinking your own thoughts, I have been thinking my own thoughts, too. I've told you that we never quarreled. But once it did cross my mind that she might have—tender feelings for someone else. I put it away from me like a blasphemy. Even when I saw many of my fellow prisoners deceived by their wives I was convinced that mine was pure. What was she made of except purity? But if she had—why funk the word?—if she had lusted after someone else that would be a complete explanation of her strange manner, of her running away to America—of everything."

When he said that, Charrington looked like a man in torment.

There was silence in the cabin while the wind roared outside. Then Yeoman blurted out, "You can't talk of lust in the same breath as Miss Heather."

"Can't I? Prove it, kill the devil that has been eating my heart so long. But how can you? What did my wife do when I was taken prisoner? I expected her to return to her Highland home. If you knew how much she thought of that place! No, she stayed in London on the excuse of some artificial job. As if a lady of her upbringing were capable of war work!"

"Meg told me she did it very well," Marcus said. "You know Meg is a good judge."

"I know she is kindhearted—and that women stick together. But in any case that is only one small point. . . . To go back: the month or two before I was captured was the most active period we had in Coastal Forces. Almost every night we were out, and generally in some sort of scrap. But when we did get an unexpected

night off it meant shore leave. Mary knew that. Would you not expect that she would wait for me—or for news of me if the luck had failed? No. On my last visit I found that she had gone out—to tea, Meg said. I waited until six o'clock next morning. But she did not return. That was a long tea party, Jack Yeoman."

"I've told you, it wouldn't have been right to let her go. We didn't know about your coming."

"We? Oh, yes, your wife was alive then. But not the next time—if it was the next time—when she stayed with you for a week."

Yeoman's big hands clenched.

"You know about that, too. I've told you. It was sheer kindness."

"It was a pity that letter was washed away in the first storm," Charrington said, his small eyes fixed on Yeoman. "I would have been interested in your explanation of why you called her your 'mistress sweet and kind.' She came to you from sheer kindness. Your wife had died suddenly—of an unknown disease, you said."

While Charrington was saying this, Yeoman looked as if he meant to rise and lay hands on him. But the last phrase stunned him. He fell back on the settee, his mouth working but no sound coming out. Charrington turned to Marcus.

"And you—you who I thought my friend—spent a fortnight with Mary in the privacy of Amulree. There was no reason why either of you should have gone there at that time except—to go together. Oh, I know that officially you lived ten miles apart. But I have been back there and unearthed some interesting facts. . . . I know why you have never mentioned Mary's name to me, and why when I confronted you with her photograph you goggled like a stranded fish and pretended not to have seen it."

"Richard!" Marcus shouted. "You are going too damned far. Stop this or—"

Charrington snorted.

"What will you do? I suppose the lot of you might overpower me, but if you did you'd drown. The yacht has driven too far into this storm for fools like you to handle her. Go up and try. One mistake and you'd dismast her or turn her on her side. Listen!"

The wind had risen to a pitch of frenzy. They could all imagine what it would be like up there. They would be numbed and battered, groping in the dark—and uncertain what to do.

"Even if a miracle got you through the storm, what then?" Charrington asked, his dark eyes boring into Marcus. "How

could you get to port? You know the condition of the stores—just enough for a straight passage, but no more. You don't know where you are or what to do—"

"I don't believe you could manage the yacht now yourself," Toby said.

"That's a lie. You've seen what I can do. I've never yet been beaten by the sea and never shall—"

"Let him finish," Boyd said. "We are only prolonging this."

"That's right, Mr. Scientist. And I'm coming to you. But Toby first. Toby, you should not leave your diary lying about, and you should not have written with so little restraint to a person who never destroyed a letter or even locked them up. I wonder how you will explain your references to that moment when you held her trembling in your arms. And what was the unmistakable sign from Heaven that you and she were meant to be together?"

"I've told you that I am not going to utter a damned word now," Toby said. "But when we get ashore—"

"Ah, when you get ashore. That depends on your justification when you reach the place—"

"Tell me what I did," Boyd said.

Charrington swung round to him. He had been working himself into a passion and his face was now wild as the storm sounded.

"You—you ask that. You who forced yourself on a lonely woman returning to her husband. I've read the evidence of the court of inquiry, read between the lines. You were in the dark stern of the ship with her for most of the night. What you did is between you and the devil, for you made sure that she would tell no one of it—"

"Stop that and listen to me," Boyd said. He spoke no louder than usual but his voice was cold and hard. "You pretend you started this voyage with the most sympathetic motives and that it was we who drove you to this fine frenzy. But you gave yourself away when you admitted that you read your wife's letters, and when you told us that you went back to Amulree—a place you hated—to spy on her. God knows what you intended, but you had condemned us before we even came on board. The only true word you have spoken is that I lied to you the other night—"

Charrington jumped to his feet. Boyd went on speaking slowly and distinctly.

"I lied to save your feelings, but you are not worth considera-

tion. You shall have the truth now. Yes, your wife came on board the liner happy though very weak—ecstatic even. She was going home to rest—to Amulree where she was truly loved and appreciated. She had not had your cable then. We were at sea before that was relayed. It meant that instead of gaining strength at Amulree she would find you waiting on the quay. Her spirit snapped at last. I know what I am saying for she gave me her full confidence. Now I have heard the other side, and I can judge. . . . You killed her—you with your overwhelming conceit, your blind animal egoism. She was never unfaithful, but she preferred death to being touched by you again. Now stop your posturing and go sail the yacht she gave you, if you can.”

All the blood had drained from Charrington’s face. Slowly it came back until the veins were standing out like creepers on a brick wall. “If what you say is true I do not care—I’ll take you to face her all together. I—”

Charrington fell sideways. The light went out. There was a snapping of wood and a shrill clatter of broken glass. Water poured into the saloon. They felt *Heather Mary* being picked up and thrown down violently on her side.

Heather Mary must have been on her beam-ends for only a few seconds. The wave passed and left her in the trough. She righted herself. The men lay on the floor in a foot or so of water. They could not distinguish each other. But their eyes were drawn to the patch of comparative brightness—the gaping hole of the smashed portside skylight. Through it, high above, they saw the glint of moving foam.

Another wave struck them. *Heather Mary* scarcely rolled to it, she was so heavy. But more water came jetting in, frothing and hissing, pouring down on top of them.

They were all on their feet now. One of them plunged splashing through the afterdoor of the saloon, which was open, and up the ladder steps of the companionway. They heard him grunt as he tried to slide back the hatch.

It was stuck. He could not move it. And there was only room for one man on the companionway. He realized this and jumped down again. The rest had been pressing behind, and he landed among them, causing more confusion. He plowed through them—it was Charrington—and tried to open the galley door.

It was jammed. The whole yacht must have been twisted and warped by the strength of the blow.

Their instinct was to get out on deck. The storm—anything—was better than this trap. And as conscious thoughts began to form they realized that this was their only chance. They must reach the tiller and turn the yacht so that her wounded side no longer faced the wind. If two or three more waves poured into her, she would founder. But they were shut in. They threw themselves behind Charrington against the galley door. It splintered. They charged through the galley, into the forward cabin.

The vertical iron ladder was there, roofed by the forward hatch. This hatch was a two-foot-square piece of mahogany which opened on hinges like a box lid. But it would not open. At the beginning of the storm they had lashed the canvas cover over it.

Yeoman began scrabbling about in the water and the darkness looking for an axe among the scattered tools.

"The Skipper's cabin," Boyd said.

These were the first words anyone had spoken during the hundred seconds since the freak wave struck. There had been plenty of noise, of course—their movements, their breathing, and above all the storm. But a human voice was like a new creation in the chaos, and it rallied them. They all knew the double skylight which was just forward of the cockpit. Like the forward hatch it had a canvas cover lashed over it. But it was made of plate glass, not mahogany. They could break out there.

In fact, they found one of the panes on the port side broken already. Charrington opened his knife, reached above his head, and slashed the canvas cover. Then he caught hold of the sides of the frame and pulled himself up. Marcus and Boyd put their shoulders under his feet and pushed.

It was hard work. Charrington seemed to be stuck. Wetness dripped on their heads. But they were used to that. They were in a good position and pushed hard. They got him out.

At that moment Yeoman joined them with the axe. They broke the other pane of glass and cut through the separating wooden frame before they scrambled on deck, one after the other.

It was dark, of course, with spray blowing past in a horizontal stream, stinging their eyes and making it difficult to breathe. There were no sails. The deck was piled like a rubbish heap with spars and canvas. Charrington was in the flooded cockpit leaning

his weight against the tiller. But nothing was happening. *Heather Mary* wallowed deep as a sponge in a bath.

Charrington shouted his orders—"Marcus, Boyd—pump! Yeoman, plug that hole. Toby, stow that gear or cut it away."

They obeyed at once, unhesitatingly. The accusations, jealousy and threats were quite forgotten. Those were abstract things, swept away by the great wave. Now they were all fighting for their lives against a common enemy, and Charrington was the leader.

The night that followed was a bad dream. Marcus and Boyd, at the pump, succeeded, by a superhuman effort, in lightening the yacht so she came round. Charrington ran her off downwind and held her with the waves dead astern. As a temporary measure, the other two struggled to nail canvas over the broken skylights.

Heather Mary retreated through the darkness, rolling and plunging with her speed, and the wind, racing up after her, howled and boomed as it swept past her empty rigging. The dark waves reached forward with the wind. They caught up the yacht, hissing as they came, and slapped down on top of her, reaching out white fingers from stern to stem. The crew were conscious only of the necessity to get their jobs done somehow and at once.

At last they became aware that it was not quite so dark. There was no sign of sunrise—nothing except spray and cloud. They couldn't tell where the water ended and the air began. But the night must be coming to an end at last.

The bilge water was now only a few inches deep on the cabin floor. Yeoman stretched his agonizing muscles and felt that he could rest for a moment. . . . And then he began to shiver. He looked down at himself. In the gray light he saw that he was dressed only in trousers and a vest—what he had been wearing at dinner in the cabin. He was horrified. Presumably they were all like that. They would catch their deaths! But it was too late to think of putting on oilskins now. The only thing which might save them was a good hot cup of tea.

The torch was being used so he borrowed Toby's lighter. By its small flame he found his way below. It was quite difficult, even apart from the rolling and pitching, to get through the saloon. It was cluttered with the shattered table, broken bottles and glasses, all the books, remains of the barograph, biscuits, cereals and other food, pillows and bedding. The galley was in an even worse mess. Every pot and pan and quantities of food tins were on

the floor. A jug of coffee, prepared by Charrington, had disappeared but left stains even on the ceiling. The demijohn of kerosene was rolling about. Most of the fuel had run out.

By now the lighter was so hot that it burned Yeoman's fingers. He extinguished it. Then he set about getting one of the pressure stoves burning. It was filthy, of course; but after a thorough wiping he pumped it up and the flame purred. (That was the first pleasant sound.) He filled the kettle with water and put it on the stove. Then he leaned back against the wall and went to sleep.

Charrington also had been below. He had collected the weatherboards which they had used to keep themselves in their bunks when the yacht rolled. He was nailing these over the broken skylights, making a proper job of it, with canvas to cover the cracks. Two of his crew were helping him while the third steered. There was just enough light to work by.

Yeoman was wakened by the noise of the kettle boiling over. He made the tea and carried it on deck. There, the work being finished, they drank together. They spilled a good deal of tea because they were shivering so much from cold and that extreme reaction which brings tears to the eyes. But each scalding mouthful revived them further. They were no longer intent upon a task of the moment but could notice things as a whole.

In the growing light they saw the immensity of the ocean. The waves were forming without any apparent reason, rising up into cones like slag heaps, then collapsing and rising somewhere else, barging about without enough wind to discipline them. And the yacht? Her deck was a shambles of broken spars and torn canvas. All that remained of the dinghy was a length or two of curved planking. Toby felt sick with retrospective fear, realizing how near the yacht must have been to complete destruction. Brave little *Heather Mary*!

What had kept her alive? The group of tired men drinking tea, Charrington in the middle of them. Or—

"Good lord, Skipper, what's happened to your trousers?"

They were tattered and a dirty rust color. Charrington did not answer. His face was gray and his eyes heavy.

Boyd dropped on his knees, pulled open one of the rents and examined the bare leg while Charrington sat like a statue.

"Skipper," Boyd said, "come below."

Charrington did not appear to have heard him.

Marcus and Yeoman lifted him to his feet and took him carefully and slowly to his cabin. They laid him on his bunk and cut away what remained of his trousers. On his buttocks and the outer sides of his thighs were long deep cuts which were still bleeding. He must have lost a great deal of blood.

CHAPTER 9

STUMBLING and slipping first one way and then the other in the water on the rubbish-covered floor of the Skipper's cabin, they only got in each other's way. So all except Boyd went on deck.

There they sat under the attic ceiling of gray sky, the lowest cloud fragments trailing close above like cobwebs. As the yacht dipped her sides under water, fragments of the smashed dinghy, pieces of spars, canvas or cordage—anything left loose upon the deck—was licked overboard. They watched with indifference. They were exhausted and the whole thing was such a mess.

When Boyd came up, Marcus asked, "How is he? Will he recover?"

"I don't know. I'm not a medical doctor. I only did what seemed necessary." He was strangely abrupt.

"What's the next move?" Marcus asked.

"Sleep."

"There's a good deal to settle—"

"Exactly. But it is important. So sleep first—and then, I hope, clear heads."

Toby took a grip on himself. "What happens if he comes to meanwhile?"

"He won't," Boyd answered. They looked at him inquiringly but he said no more and led the way below.

They swept the debris off their bunks and squelched down on them in their oilskins.

Boyd woke first. In spite of his weariness he had not slept deeply, and only for four hours. The first thing he noticed was that the water on the floor had risen an inch or two. The yacht must be leaking, but only slowly. That was a minor worry. At the door of the Skipper's cabin he hesitated, then turned away. He called the others. They ate damp biscuits in silence.

Marcus asked: "How's Richard?"

"I haven't looked," Boyd said. "He will still be unconscious. I gave him three sleeping pills." He shrugged his shoulders. "We'll go and look if you like. But it's much more important to decide what we're going to do."

Charrington lay on his back. His face was colorless and his mouth open. Quickly Boyd put a hand on his chest. After a moment or two he sighed and said quietly: "He's alive."

Toby turned and left the cabin.

"Look at this," Yeoman said.

In the water on the floor was a sodden mass of books, charts, biscuits and papers. He had picked up the photograph of Heather and was wiping it carefully with his sleeve. "To think anyone so gentle should be the start of so much trouble."

Marcus and Yeoman stood looking at the photograph while Toby's feet clumped up the companionway. Then his excited voice broke out above them: "Come quick—quickly!"

As soon as they reached the deck they saw the vessel. She was only a few hundred yards distant but moving rapidly away from them, a wall of white foam at her stern and black smoke trailing out across the water.

They waved frantically. They could distinguish no one on the deck but an angry light began to flash dots and dashes at them from the bridge. It paused, as if waiting for a reply, then flashed again. When it stopped, the vessel itself was almost out of sight, for it was impossible to see far in that weather.

"Anybody read Morse?" Boyd asked.

"Not at that speed," Marcus said. "She was a destroyer, wasn't she? What the devil was she doing out here?"

"Naval exercises, I suppose."

"They might have stopped to investigate. After all, a little yacht without sails—"

"That kind of sailor doesn't know some boats need sails," Toby said.

"It's no use crying over spilled milk," Marcus said with an attempt at briskness. "We'd better start setting our ship in order. What do you think, Boyd?"

"She is riding well enough. I think the first job is to settle the party line."

"You mean for when Richard comes to?"

"Yes. There is not much wrong with his legs. It was just the blood he lost. Once he has slept off his weakness he will be able to get about. How are we going to treat him?"

"Tie him up with the thickest ropes on board," Toby said. "And I suggest we do it before he wakes."

"We can't do that," Marcus protested.

"Mutiny, I suppose—"

Boyd put in quickly, "Never mind what you call it. It would mean the end of all coöperation, and we've got to decide whether we can do without him. If we decide we can't, what do we do—let him take command again as if nothing had happened?"

"Do you think we might reason with him?" Yeoman suggested.

"No. I'm sure that the relationship of each of you with Heather was the same as mine was—affectionate and absolutely harmless. But Charrington's brain is his own Iago. It twists facts in the most abominable way."

"He got excited once before," Marcus said. "But by talking of ordinary subjects and keeping off Heather—"

"We did not mention Heather first, he did."

"Why risk it? Tie him up," Toby said.

Marcus's sunburned face became redder than ever. "Get this clear. We are not going to tie up a wounded man. If I can't persuade you, I'll order you. I'm in command now. But look at it sensibly. Here we are, four strong, fit men scared about what one casualty may do to us. Surely we can keep a watch on him and look after ourselves. Isn't that common sense?"

"I agree," Boyd said, "but for a reason Marcus has not given. Before the storm the Skipper had a line of retreat. Whatever he intended, he could have got away in the dinghy. She was seaworthy as a lifeboat. But the dinghy is gone. We literally sink or float together and I don't believe Charrington means to sink."

"All right then," Marcus said. "Everyone agree?"

"Just one suggestion," Toby said. "Of course we can look after ourselves—so long as he's not armed. But hadn't we better make sure about that?"

"It's a point," Marcus said. "Doing the food check, I've been through the whole yacht except his cabin. I'll search that now. Will you come with me, Boyd?"

Half an hour later Marcus returned to the cockpit and said: "No offensive weapons. But here's something for you, Toby."

Toby took the notebook and his face lit up with happiness. "Thank heaven! I thought the whole voyage was wasted. Now—let anything happen."

"Look," Yeoman said, pointing.

A rift had appeared in the clouded sky to windward, showing a patch of blue. The patch increased rapidly in area. The dirty clouds slipped down to the horizon. Suddenly the world was blue and dazzlingly bright in the afternoon sunshine.

The effect upon their spirits was immediate. They became cheerful and optimistic. Toby and Yeoman climbed the mast and managed to get the trysail set—after a fashion—pulling the head up after them and tying it to the mast. Meanwhile the other two patched and reset the jib. An hour before sunset they were ready, they believed, to put *Heather Mary* on her course again.

"What course shall we steer?" Boyd asked.

"The same as before the storm," Marcus answered. "What was it then?"

"Northwest by west," Boyd answered. "But I take no responsibility for where it will get us to from here. We weren't aiming for Bermuda then, but Point X—and heaven knows where that is or where we ran from it in the storm."

"When do you expect the Skipper will come to?" Toby asked.

"I doubt if he'll be fully conscious before tomorrow morning."

Yeoman asked: "How will he wake up, Doctor? I mean, after all that sleep will he jump out of bed like a liver-salts advertisement, or will he sort of grumble and come coherent slowly like a person who's had a night on the town?"

"I'm not a medical doctor. I can only describe my own experience, and people react differently. Those pills made me sleep, but I never took them unless I had a free day following. I spent most of that day waking up."

"Then we'll have time in the morning to make her shipshape, that's a good thing. She's a disgrace now—sails hauled up anyhow like an old woman paddling. I wonder if she'll go into the wind."

It took a long time to persuade *Heather Mary* to swing around and face into the wind on her old course. When she finally did so, she traveled very slowly. They settled down to sleep and regular watches. To conserve kerosene for cooking and the navigation lights they decided not to use the oil lamp in the saloon. It was a dark, discouraging night.

NEXT MORNING the weather had improved, but there was little else to be thankful about. According to the log they had traveled only a dozen miles during the night. The yacht would not sail into the wind with her canvas crudely lashed to a broken mast.

They began trying to reset the rigging—but with little confidence. Hard facts, distances, were in their minds as they worked. They must be at least a hundred miles from Point X. The *Prince Rupert*, Boyd said, had steamed for twelve hours at about twenty-five knots before Heather disappeared. So Point X must be about three hundred miles from Bermuda—on whatever bearing the *Prince Rupert* had been sailing. On that information they could have very little hope of finding Bermuda—and America was six or seven hundred miles farther on. About one thousand miles at, say, twenty miles a day meant over five weeks. The wounded yacht would not survive another storm, and at this season another storm was certain within that time. Besides, a quantity of stores had been ruined. Therefore they must somehow re-rig the yacht so that she sailed faster, and they must find Bermuda. Although none of them expressed it aloud they each realized they had no choice in their behavior toward Charrington. At all costs he must be persuaded to navigate them to Bermuda. Thank God he was only asleep, not dead!

Marcus turned his crew's energies from the skilled sailor's tasks he did not understand to a busy, systematic tidying of the deck. They pitched the rubbish of torn canvas and splintered spars into the sea. But anything which might serve—whole lengths of wood, for instance—they lashed down where the dinghy used to be.

They were interrupted by a noise which puzzled them at first because they had not heard it for so long—the hum of an airplane. They broke off what they were doing and searched the sky for it.

They saw it, a silver insect traveling across the dazzling blue. They stood and stared until the sight and sound faded. They felt first excited and then disappointed.

"Never mind," Marcus said. "It must have been bound for Bermuda. Lots of air routes center there. Somebody will see us soon—or better, we might arrive on our own."

At about eleven o'clock in the morning, the yacht still plunging slowly and with apparent unwillingness through the shoreless sea, Toby went below to make coffee.

As he went down the companionway he put a cigarette in his

mouth and took his lighter from his pocket. But a sudden whiff of fuel stopped him from lighting it.

Charrington was standing in the saloon with his back to Toby. He had placed the oil lamp on the table, and at his feet was a four-gallon gasoline can. In the surprise of seeing Charrington on his feet and busy Toby did not realize the significance of this. But he had at once a feeling that something was very wrong indeed.

Charrington took a box of matches from the locker and removed a match.

Toby stared, numbed and fascinated. Here was the familiar scene—Marcus's bunk, the table where they ate their meals, the old, rather dirty brass lamp—and the Skipper, who ought to have been in his bunk, calmly engaged in this unbelievably terrible occupation. The whole place reeked with gasoline fumes.

Charrington flicked the match across the striking surface. Its head came off. He struck a second match—with the same result. Looking for another box, he turned and saw Toby.

"Lend me your lighter. These matches are all wet," he said.

Toby came out of his trance. He dived at Charrington.

By the force of the attack Charrington was knocked onto the gasoline-soaked settee. But a moment later he had Toby by the throat. Toby felt an agonizing pain as if he had been stabbed in the neck, and a hot light blazed at the back of his eyes. Then he was flung back across the saloon. He brought up with a thud on the opposite settee and struck his head violently against the wall. He sat there dazed and gasping.

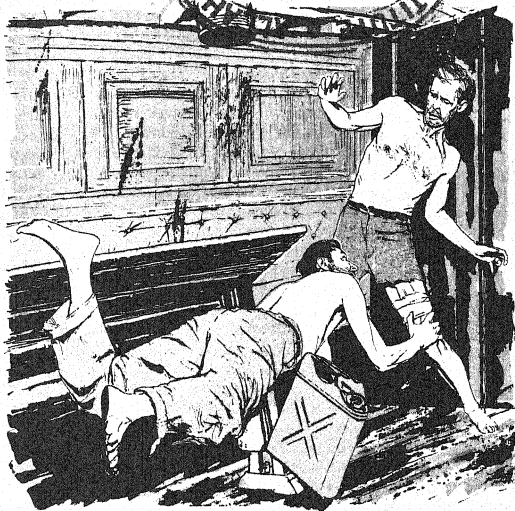
"Knocked something over?" Yeoman's voice asked from the hatch. There was no answer. Yeoman began to descend the companionway. Like Toby he was barefooted for their work on the mast, so made no sound. But, from the saloon, first his shins, then his body became visible. He entered the saloon. His eyes and nostrils opened wide. He sniffed, staring from Charrington to Toby.

"Fetch the others," Charrington said.

Yeoman disappeared without a word. In half a minute he was back with Boyd. None of them said anything until Marcus joined them, evidently excited.

"I heard you were up, Richard. Splendid," he began. "There is something away to windward—probably just a bit of Sargasso weed. But will you lend me your binoc—"

Then he became conscious of the fumes and sensed the strain.



"Sit down there on the other side of Toby," Charrington said. His eyes had a vague, dreamy look and his voice was muffled.

"You ought to be in your bunk," Boyd told him. "What were you doing?"

"I had just filled the lamp. I was going to light it and trim it. The matches were all wet. I asked Toby to lend me his lighter"—he held it up—"but he attacked me."

"It isn't kerosene, it's gasoline," Boyd said.

"Is it?"

"Yes. It wouldn't do for the lamp at all, and you have spilled it all over the place. You had better go back to your cabin while we tidy up. Let me help you."

"No, sit there," Charrington said. "Of course I knew it was gasoline really. And I soaked the bunk on purpose. If I lit this thing it wouldn't catch fire, it would explode. I was lying just now. But you discovered last night it isn't any good telling lies."

"We were not lying," Marcus said.

"That's what you keep on saying. But it's not worth while arguing about it now. Last night I gave you a chance to make a clean breast of it. It was a sort of confessional before reaching the place. But you declined it. Now we have arrived and there is very little more to say."

"Richard, you are a day out in your reckoning," Marcus said in his most persuasive tone. "It wasn't last night we were talking. There has been a storm in between, and then you were unconscious. You hurt yourself badly. You are still unwell."

"It is no good trying to deceive me," Charrington said, looking at Marcus with a fixed, unnatural stare. "I have thought about this much too long and carefully." As he spoke he kicked the jerry can over so that more and more gasoline welled out with slow hiccuping noises.

"You have always boasted about this lighter, Toby," Charrington went on. "But even if it doesn't light first time the spark will be enough. We don't want a vulgar scene. This is a solemn moment. We have reached the place where Mary is buried."

"No, that's not correct," Boyd said. "When we were talking, you said we would reach the place next morning. But in the storm we had to turn and run away from it. Now we must be a hundred miles away from it at least. We ought to beat back to it before finishing the discussion."

"Do you think you know more about navigation than I do?" Charrington asked, a flash of anger in his sleepy voice. "This is Mary's grave, I tell you. This is where we settle it."

"How?"

"With this." Charrington held up the lighter.

The four men opposite him glanced sideways at each other, wondering if any of them had a plan.

"Skipper," Boyd said, "the dinghy has been destroyed. If this yacht sinks, we all sink with her—all."

"Exactly," Charrington said. "You brought it to this, you know."

"I? How?" Boyd, like the rest of them, was trying to talk in

a normal voice. That seemed the only chance of calming or diverting Charrington. With the table between them there could be no hope of disarming him except by words.

"You lied to me," Charrington said, "but you made me realize that I had been lying, also—not to you, to myself. Listen carefully, and don't move. Since I escaped from Germany and found her gone, all my thoughts about Mary have been anchored to the belief that she started back to England when she got my cable. I lived on that. But you have convinced me that was not so. She was going back to her damned wilderness. When she heard I was waiting for her, she killed herself rather than face me. . . . That is not a pleasant realization for a husband. But why could she not face me? Because you—you four—had made it impossible. Oh, I know you will deny it still. But there's no need. We are going to blow this yacht of hers to smithereens. What's the use of lying now? We are going, all together, to face the little sanctimonious cheat and get the truth out of her herself."

Charrington had worked himself into a passion. None of them had any doubt that he meant what he said. In desperation they were all poised to jump at him directly he should shift his eyes.

Charrington paused, getting back his breath, watching their faces—cat and mouse.

"Well, Jack, a penny for them. I'm sure they will be worth it."

Yeoman had not spoken a word. For most of the time he had sat listening, apparently completely overcome by a state of affairs so utterly removed from his experience, from his imagination even.

But now he said angrily: "You called Miss Heather a cheat. You have no right to do that. If she could hear you—"

"No doubt she can hear me. We are right on top of her grave."

"Are we? That explains it," Yeoman shouted with sudden excitement. "Yes, I suppose she *can* hear you. It must have been her calling out these last five minutes. Listen!"

They all stared at him. He had become as possessed almost as Charrington. "Listen!"

They had heard it before while Charrington was speaking—a sea bird crying plaintively every now and then. But Jack put a new character to it. Suddenly, in spite of Charrington, in spite of their sickening danger, he dominated the saloon. "Listen—it's her!"

By the honesty of his conviction he changed the sound in their ears from that of a sea bird to something very like a woman's cry.

He got to his feet and leaned his arms on the table with his face close to Charrington's. "Don't do anything silly like blowing us all up, Skipper. Nobody will ever know the truth if you do that. If Miss Heather is here she will want to talk to us alive."

Charrington stared at him. Something in his half-drugged mind seemed to respond.

"There really is a woman out there," Yeoman went on. "I don't understand how it can be Miss Heather. But I'm going to look."

Slowly and rather clumsily he stepped over their legs and went out of the saloon, up the companionway.

None of them knew what to make of it. They were so puzzled, so affected, that they followed Yeoman with their eyes until he was out of sight. Only then—although it was on this their lives depended—did they turn to see how Charrington was reacting.

His aquiline face was working with excitement. But he was no longer sure of himself. He had half risen and was staring after Yeoman as if he wanted to follow but was held back by the fear of something he did not understand.

Yeoman reappeared at the door of the saloon. He was beaming.

"I was right," he said, nodding at Charrington. "She's quite close. Come and see."

CHARRINGTON still hesitated. The others sat watching him. They were like members of an audience who feel the power and urgency of a strange music but are puzzled in the presence of those few who can interpret it.

The sea bird cried again. One had accompanied them since they passed Madeira. They had not noticed it since the beginning of the storm, but before that, as far as they could remember, it had been with them almost every day—a white bird with long wings which glided low over the water, hung in the air, moved without effort. They had come to forget its presence because it was so usual. They could not remember if it had cried before.

Charrington began to follow Yeoman. He moved slowly and stiffly, holding onto things for support. When he was gone, they looked at each other questioningly, and shrugged their shoulders. Marcus righted and closed the jerry can. Then they hurried on deck—with very little idea of what they expected to find.

Charrington was there, of course, but they took no particular notice of him. They looked eagerly around the circle of heaving

ocean. They saw the white bird swooping gracefully along a wave crest—that was all. Their hearts dropped with a disappointment they could not have expressed even to themselves.

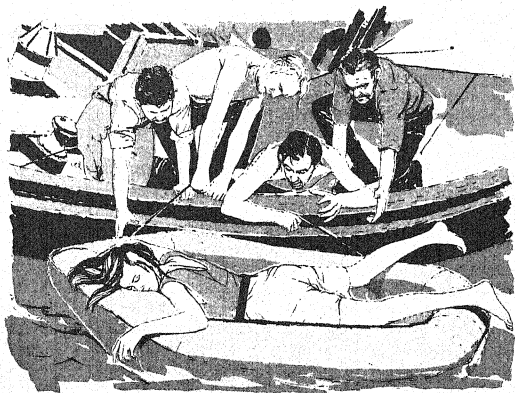
"There!" Yeoman was pointing.

One of the valleys had become a mound of water. On it was a human figure. Although the distance was too great to see clearly they never doubted it was a woman's. She was lying face downward with arms and legs spread wide as a starfish, supported by a patch of yellow weed.

Charrington had reached the tiller and unlashed it. He shouted orders. He was a sailor again. Yeoman led the crew in obeying him. They automatically trusted the Skipper to achieve their common purpose, whether he were otherwise mad or not.

As the distance lessened—for although *Heather Mary* scarcely moved the woman drifted downwind toward them—they saw she was supported not by seaweed but a rubber float. With a well-timed maneuver Charrington swung the yacht across wind—and the float butted against her side like a lamb against its mother.

Four men were kneeling in line with outstretched arms. They



raised the woman in the float, for she was strapped to it, and so laid her on the deck.

The strap about her waist and the wet clothes clinging to her accentuated the feminine outlines of her body. In spite of the man-made float it was so strange—the shoreless ocean and this woman, this real woman dead or alive, who had come out of it.

Boyd was the first to recover his wits. He dropped on his knees, felt for her heart and then unbuckled the strap.

Charrington pushed past the others. "Don't touch her," he shouted. "Of course she's alive. Didn't you hear her?"

Kneeling himself, he swung the limp body across his shoulder and tried to rise. But with the wounds on his legs and the swaying of the yacht he could not do it without fear of falling. He laid her gently down again, still with her face hidden.

"Take her below," he said. "Carry her in the float."

They obeyed at once. It was not easy getting the float down the companionway, but it was pneumatic and could be constricted.

"Take her to my cabin."

They had to squeeze the float almost double to get it through the cabin door.

"Lay it on the bunk. Good. Now stand back." Charrington slid the woman off the float onto the mattress. She rolled onto her back, and for the first time they were able to see her face clearly. It was ugly, gray and drawn—the face of a corpse. It was an unusual shape, triangular as a cat's but with a wide mouth and full lips. The eyes were shut.

Boyd looked from this face to the photograph of Heather on the shelf above the bunk. They were not the same—far from it. The only possible similarity was in the well-marked cheekbones. Thank God, the thing was explicable—a shipwrecked woman. Heather and she had nothing in common. Charrington was trying to get the wet clothes off her. It was nonsense that he should be the only one to touch her. Boyd stepped forward.

"Get back. Get out of the cabin," Charrington said.

"I acted as your doctor—and you are alive," Boyd said in his quiet, matter-of-fact voice.

Charrington turned his head and looked at him closely for a moment. Then he nodded. Together they stripped off the soaking garments and wrapped her tightly in one of the blankets which had been dried on deck the evening before.

"Make her a hot drink, somebody," Charrington ordered.

"But, Richard, we can't—" Marcus began.

"Give her brandy," Boyd said.

Charrington took a bottle from the locker under the chart table. With his left arm round the woman's shoulders, he held it to her lips. The brandy dribbled out of her mouth again. Then she choked, and her throat worked violently as she swallowed.

"That's enough," Boyd said. Charrington laid her down again. For a moment longer she remained quite still. Then she stirred. Finding herself bound, she began to heave about. In a moment she was fighting like a wildcat in a trap, her eyes wide open and terrified. She flung the blanket away from her and would have tumbled from the bunk. Charrington grappled with her and she collapsed. She lay still except for the heaving of her breast.

With extreme care Charrington wrapped her up again. There was a strange expression on his face.

He said: "All she needs now is rest. There's little enough air—it would be better, if you don't mind—"

But in the saloon the gasoline fumes hit them like a blow on the nose and returned them to the former scene. Toby turned to Colonel Harding. "What shall we do?"

"There isn't much we can do about this except pump it out." Marcus gestured at the gasoline floating on the floor. "There isn't even a fire extinguisher or sand. And with the skylight covered with canvas, it will just have to filter away through the hatch."

"Yes, but I mean leaving him alone with her. He—lord knows what he'll do."

"It's worth the risk," Boyd said quietly.

Marcus asked: "What do you mean—worth the risk?"

"It's not much good passively keeping an eye on him. He's too clever. Our best chance is to help him recover his will to live."

"How do we set about that?" Toby asked.

"By leaving him alone at this moment."

They sat down, doubtfully, to wait. No sound came from the cabin. After some minutes Marcus took out a cigarette and tapped it on the case. Yeoman grabbed his elbow and he put it away again. The others had started violently. Their nerves were on edge.

There was a clatter of activity from the cabin, and the unmistakable noise of a drawer being tugged open and jammed shut. Marcus wondered which drawer it was and whether he had

searched it properly. Charrington came out of the cabin in a stiff-legged hurry. He paused at the entrance of the saloon and asked impatiently, "Why didn't you tell me it was almost noon?"

He clambered up the companionway. He had the sextant in his hand.

CHARRINGTON worked out their line of position at the cabin table. Toby sat opposite to him on the bare settee, watching the neat columns of figures.

"Where are we?"

"Only the latitude so far. We must have drifted a long way south. I will have to wait three hours for a longitude." He yawned. "It's absurd, but I feel bloody tired. Do you mind if I rest on your cot? We'll have to go shares now—four beds between five men."

On deck, Yeoman was staring unhappily at the heaving sea.

Boyd said: "You of all people, Jack, have no need to be despondent. Can you explain your part of the mystery?"

"There isn't any mystery," Yeoman answered. "I really thought it was Miss Heather. But it wasn't. That's why I'm sad."

Boyd and Marcus looked at each other. Marcus said: "Steady, old Jack. You know it couldn't have been."

"I suppose not. But after so long with such a lot of strange things happening you don't judge like you would at home, or I don't, not being educated." Yeoman was speaking sadly and dreamily. "I've thought such a lot about Miss Heather—thinking about her at night she came alive every time. . . . And then the Skipper mentioning the Sargasso Sea—all I read about it as a boy! I don't know—I was sort of waiting for her. . . . I felt pretty sure she'd come because that was the only reason for all this. . . . But it was someone else after all. Suddenly she's dead again. She was such a lovely person. She oughtn't to be dead."

Marcus and Boyd avoided looking at each other. Jack was sane enough. He had touched something which in their greater sophistication they had lacked the courage to share.

The white bird swooped by, beautiful and indifferent.

"Where did the cry come from?" Marcus asked. "From that bird or the woman?"

"It's a giant petrel, I think," Boyd answered. "I've never read that they were mute."

"It hasn't made a sound before."

"Are you sure? In the saloon we didn't pay any attention to the cry until Jack told us to listen. But we must have heard it and taken it for granted it was the bird."

"It can't have been the girl. She was unconscious."

"It might have been her last effort, seeing the yacht," Boyd said.

Toby came hurriedly on deck. "I think she's dying. What can we do? For heaven's sake hurry."

Boyd asked: "Why do you think she's dying?"

"She opened her eyes. But she didn't answer when I spoke to her. She just slowly closed them again."

They went down to the cabin. Her eyes were still closed but Boyd noticed that there was more life in her face. Toby's anxiety, whatever had caused it, was not justified. The woman's eyes opened, wide and big. They moved very slowly from one to another of the four men who stood looking down at her.

Toby broke the silence. "Where do you come from? Who are you?"

She stared at him. "I was in the sea," she said with a faint voice. "I was in the sea for ages and ages."

"But who are you?"

Again there was a pause, and then like the tired sigh of one falling asleep she said: "Mary—"

There was a sudden movement behind the four men. Charrington was standing in the doorway.

CHAPTER 10

WHILE SHE lay in the cabin she was not an individual but a woman who had come out of the sea, frailly and mysteriously alive. Charrington cooked for her—over a stove on deck. Boyd was her doctor. But they all saw her once or twice a day, taking her food, clearing it away, or for some minor office. They came into the cabin on tiptoe. They glanced almost reverently at her face. If her eyes were open they made some conventional remark. "You're all right now," or, "You'll be well soon." They were conscious that her eyes followed them. Sometimes there might be a ghost of a smile or a faint "Thank you." They tiptoed out.

Her presence reminded them of the conventions. They shaved, tidied themselves up and were careful about the words they used.

When they spoke of her—in low voices—their guarded remarks concerned her health and the way she had affected the Skipper. She was a woman and an influence, nothing personal.

Then, on the afternoon of the second day after her rescue, Boyd announced that she would come into the saloon for tea. Tea had never been an official meal but a refreshment snatched whenever anyone was free. Now all of them, except Yeoman, who had insisted on taking the helm, were waiting as for a formal occasion. On the battered table there was a more or less clean cloth.

She entered wearing a pair of Boyd's trousers—he was nearest to her in height—and Toby's roller-necked sweater which had been shrunk by many wettings and which she filled very well although it was much too long for her. Her face, though far from beautiful, was quite attractive with the baby-wide eyes and big generous mouth. She had tied a silk handkerchief of Charrington's over her hair, and this gave her a demure and simple look.

When they had sat down again, Marcus handed her a cup of tea.

"I'm sorry there isn't a saucer. We had some but they got broken—a storm, you know."

She smiled at him. Then she sniffed the air and remarked, "What a funny smell."

There was an awkward silence.

Charrington laughed. "I spilled some fuel the other day. But it's practically gone now. I promise to be more careful in future."

While he was speaking, Mary kept her eyes on his face intently but without particular expression. When he had done, she gave him the same quick smile with which she had acknowledged Marcus's apology. Then she took a sip of the tea and bit the corner of a biscuit. She turned to Boyd. "So you're on a yachting trip. How interesting!"

"Yes," Boyd said.

"Rather more than a yachting trip," Marcus broke in. "We are on our way from England to Bermuda."

"Bermuda," she said. "Oh—oh—"

Boyd looked interested. "Can you tell us now what happened to you?" he asked in his gentle voice.

"Please don't make me speak of it yet." Her eyes were glistening with tears.

"Certainly you need not talk of it if it pains you," Charrington said. "I'm skipper of this yacht and you are my guest."

She gave him a grateful look and recovered herself in silence. None of them had much conversation.

"So you're the skipper," she said. "It's silly but I don't know who anybody is."

They apologized and introduced themselves.

"I'm Mary Brown. I hope you will call me Mary, though. I always think people waste such a lot of time being formal. And since you rescued me—"

"Thank you, Mary," Charrington said. "I'm sure we would all be glad if you would call us by our first names. I'm Richard—he's Toby—he's Marcus, he's—"

"I call him Doc," Mary said. "I'm sorry I was silly just now. I was frightened for a minute. But you are all so kind. Of course I'll be glad to go to Bermuda. When will we arrive?"

"That depends on a number of things," Charrington answered.

NEXT MORNING when Toby was alone with his notebook in the saloon Mary Brown came in.

"What are you writing?" she asked.

"Just an account of the voyage. I try to keep it up every day."

"How wonderful. Are you going to write a book?"

"I might. I hope so."

"How wonderful to be able to write a book—or to be in one."

She sat opposite to Toby, her arms on the table, looking straight at him with glowing eyes and parted lips.

"It's nothing much. I — " He became confused by the appearance of his old roller-necked sweater.

"What, Toby?" she asked.

"I—I was only going to say that of course you would be in it. You would be about the most important person. The way you turned up was just about miraculous."

She leaned still farther across the table. "It *would* make a wonderful story. Just like a novel. I'd been in Hollywood. I was coming home for a rest, flying, of course. The weather was bad. I'm sure they'll say that's why we crashed—"

"What happened to the other people?" Toby asked.

"I suppose they were drowned—tragic. Perhaps they were saved. They had big rafts and things. I'm sure they'll say it was the weather. That's partly right, of course, but I know the pilot was madly jealous. He wanted me to sit beside him, but I—"

"What exactly happened?" Toby asked.

She began to explain—but Toby's mind wandered. He couldn't disbelieve her because here she was. She was young and attractive and he liked her.

While he was looking into her face, nodding at her words but scarcely hearing them for his own thoughts, the door opened and Charrington came in. He said, "It occurred to me that float of yours would make the nearest thing to a comfortable seat we've got on board. So I've fixed it up on deck. It's a nice day and the fresh air will do you good. Would you like to try it, Mary?"

"Thank you, Richard. I'll come at once."

From that day onward, since the weather was fine, Mary Brown made a habit of reclining in what she called her "throne" on deck where she could talk to the helmsman. Increasingly, when he was not busy with his navigation, Charrington made it a party of three. Thus rarely except at night was the man on watch alone. Once when Marcus relieved Boyd at four in the morning, he asked in a whisper, "What do you think of her?"

"Whatever one's personal feelings about her may be, one must consider her an asset. She has certainly revived the Skipper's will to live, and she is encouraging him to hurry to Bermuda."

"She eats a lot," Marcus said.

"What's the state of the stores?"

"Bad. There isn't any fresh water to spare, either. I had to start the tank in the Skipper's cabin yesterday."

"There are about thirty-five gallons in that, aren't there?"

"Yes. We'll be all right if we are careful. I'll tell you a strange thing, though. That photograph of Heather has gone. It would be cheek if that girl has hidden it."

"More likely to be Charrington."

"He hasn't taken it with him. He couldn't, sleeping in a different bunk every night—"

"He may have got rid of it."

"But, good lord," Marcus began and stopped, staring at Boyd. "You don't think he's falling for this girl. She's quite attractive, but he was married to Heather. She has never left his mind. He couldn't do a switch, not in a week."

"He might not admit it was a switch."

"He couldn't confuse the two. The only similarity is in their names, and Mary is the commonest name in the world."

"Don't you think he might believe that a more submissive, more appreciative Mary has risen like a watery phoenix from the grave of the first? I know little about madness—"

"But he's not mad," Marcus protested. "Of course, some things drive him off his head—we know it only too well. But no one who was really mad could have patched up a wounded yacht as he has and coaxed her along so well. Besides, he has been so open with us, keeping the chart in the saloon. He has even taught you to navigate, hasn't he? Whether it's the fact of having rescued this girl from the sea or what, I do believe he's cured."

"Would you like to make a bet?" Boyd asked. "I'll buy you a case of whisky if within a week of our arrival in Bermuda Charrington hasn't sold *Heather Mary*, even to be broken up."

"But he has often said *Heather Mary* is the perfect yacht. She can be repaired in a shipyard."

"His pride can't. Now he knows that Heather killed herself to escape him, he hates her memory. Whether or not one Mary can replace another, he will get rid of everything that reminds him of Heather. But I must go to bed. Which bunk is vacant? I don't want to crawl in on top of Charrington in the dark."

NEXT DAY Charrington set them to work on the hull and rigging. There was not much more that they could do effectively, for lack of materials. But the work occupied their minds and the day passed quietly enough. Mary Brown had spent it sprawling luxuriantly in her "throne," watching with interest and talking in her vivacious way to anyone who happened to be near her. In the evening she suggested that they should have supper on deck.

They finished as the sun sank below the horizon in a golden burst of glory, leaving the little yacht alone in the middle of an opal-colored sea. There was not even the white bird to keep her company.

Mary sighed. "The only thing I miss is a campfire," she said. "It's so romantic telling stories round a campfire."

In the startled silence which this remark caused she went on, "Last night Richard was telling me about his war adventures—his tremendous fights in gunboats and things, and then when he was wounded and taken prisoner how he tried to get back to his wife. It was lovely. But you didn't finish, Richard. Won't you tell us how you actually got back to her?"

There was a crevasse of silence.

"We have asked him that before but he won't talk about it," Toby said.

"I'm sure he will for me, won't you, Richard?"

Again there was a silence.

"Certainly I will tell you how I came home," Charrington said.

IT WOULD be difficult to imagine a more peaceful scene than that in which Charrington began his story. The water was smooth as silk. The colors were fading out of it as the clouds which it reflected turned from red and gold to gray. The whole world—the round ocean and the doming walls of sky—seemed to be closing like a flower to sleep. Charrington spoke quietly, for his hearers were close about him on the deck, some of them smoking, all of them quite still.

But Marcus felt his heart thumping. He had recognized the start of the same old drum dance. He had done what he could, as they all had, to prevent it—obeyed Richard's orders, behaved as if there had never been anything strained between them. But this newborn woman had barged in, walked into the holy place with her boots on. Forcibly to interrupt him now would only precipitate the climax.

Let it ride. Listen for the danger signal and be ready to jump first, that was all they could hope to do.

To some extent the other three of the crew felt the same. They sat like coiled springs, listening to the tone of Charrington's voice rather than the words. But since the pitch did not rise they began to hear the story.

He was telling of an escape plan he had hatched at the beginning of 1944. He had just been transferred, he said, to a camp from which, the Kommandant boasted, no one had managed to escape. It was in a plain, with no sort of cover within miles. That was its strength. But Charrington had only one idea in his mind when he examined his new quarters.

"While I was still thinking over the problem, the Kommandant sent for me. He said that he knew all about my record—that was why I had been transferred to his camp—and he wanted to save me the trouble of trying to get out. He had studied the records of every break in this war and the last and had taken measures to prevent a repetition of any of them."

"How horribly discouraging," Mary said.

"It was helpful. From people who had been caught again I also had heard, first- or second-hand, about every important break. I had to think of something new. But there wasn't anything new—not at that stage of the war. Then I remembered an escape from Warburg a couple of years earlier when about thirty officers climbed over the wire using home-made assault ladders. The ladders were beautifully constructed, sliding on themselves and opening like an inverted L so that the men could climb above the first fence, cross the gap to the next and swing outside. Of course, the Kommandant would know of this escape. But he would believe, as the authorities in the camp had believed, that the ladders had been dropped by the RAF during a nearby raid a few nights earlier. Therefore, if I could imitate their stealth and carpentry I had a chance. And a mass break was what I needed. A man alone would



probably be caught by the patrols outside the wire. But if there were a lot of us scattering in different directions I would have a very good chance. . . ."

Charrington's voice, urgent and intense, went on and on in the quiet night. They had good reason to fear him in such a mood. But he was talking to the girl, not to them, and surely he meant her no harm. Besides, what sudden damage could he do—on deck, with the four of them surrounding him, on a calm night? So they listened, quiet and watchful—and more and more interested.

In great detail, Charrington described the secret preparations of the next three months. There were ladders to be made, teams to be organized. Every night the escapers practiced in the music room, using two wires stretched nine feet above the floor to simulate the double fence. The noise they made was covered by music and there was a screen of watchers outside the hut.

That was only part of the organization. A meteorologist must calculate the best evening for the attempt to start. Maps must be made and routes worked out, for the essence of the second phase was dispersal. Diversionists must be enlisted and trained for their thankless task of getting themselves into trouble with no hope of escaping. Someone must discover how to short-circuit the lights, and do it at the exact moment without rehearsal. Security was vital. When there is nothing else of interest to talk about, it is cruelly difficult to keep a secret. Therefore, though every man must be thoroughly briefed in his own task, he must know as little as possible about the rest. Above all there was the problem of maintaining interest and morale during the long months of preparation.

Charrington had dealt with all this. He alone carried all the responsibility, all the details in his head.

While he was now telling his story, the darkness closed in like a black wall around the yacht. His voice dropped to a whisper. They leaned closer to him, listening like conspirators.

At last the chosen moment arrived. Charrington gave the word which he had been living to give through sixteen weeks of ceaseless strain. The lights went out all around the camp and over the wire. From the far side of the camp came a sudden furious shouting as if a fight had broken out. English voices bellowed contradictory orders in German. Charrington waited until he judged the sentries would have turned. Then he said: "Go."

The black caterpillars of the escape teams emerged. The ladders were thrown against the inner fence, the crosspieces extended. Forty seconds later firing started in earnest and the lights went on again. But by then thirty-nine British officers, in parties of two or three, were scattering in every direction across the country.

"And you?" Mary asked breathlessly. "Where were you, Richard?"

"I was leaning against the hut with a couple of crutches under my arms," Charrington said in a flat voice. "During the last practice I fell and wrenched my leg."

Charrington lit his pipe. For a moment they saw his tired and angry face. They felt half sorry for him but they were glad that he was still a prisoner. They felt safer so.

"But you did escape. You told me you escaped," Mary insisted, on her knees in front of him.

"I got out of Germany in the end."

"How?"

"I would rather not speak of it."

"You must, you must. You can't stop like—like a magazine. I can't sleep till you tell me how you got home."

"Don't, Richard," Marcus said quietly. "Leave it alone."

But Charrington seemed not to hear him, as if his ears were tuned only to the woman's voice.

"I went on trying," he said. "But I was so tired. They were watching me like cats and I didn't get anywhere. It was a year without news and almost without hope."

"And then in March '45 they moved the camp. The Allies were getting too close. We could hear the guns when the wind was right. They moved us at short notice."

"We were marching along the main road eastward. The column was three or four hundred yards long. The guards weren't thicker than one every thirty yards, but in that open country with the corn hardly showing there was no chance of slipping away. They were taking us farther from the frontier, but there was a sense of freedom in being outside the wire. It was a lovely spring morning, soft and warm, not a cloud in the sky."

"We had been going for not more than half an hour when a reconnaissance plane came over and we identified it as one of ours. It flew up and down the column and we were sure it had recognized us. We were sorry when it went westward. It was a

link with home. Then more planes came back, wheeling in formation. Someone shouted: 'My God, they're coming at us!'

"We dived for the ditch and the little piles of stones at the roadside. For the next twenty minutes the planes made a systematic attack on the column, flying at two or three hundred feet and firing with all their guns. They made runs down the road, across it at right angles, and diagonally—while we lay there without any proper cover, cursing or praying. There seemed no reason why they should stop before everyone was dead. After all those years in prison, with the end of the war in sight, we were being systematically murdered by our own people. It was the most dreadful thing that has ever happened to me—bar one.

"The man beside me was hit by an explosive bullet. On the other side of me one of the guards was lying with his face pressed into the earth. His helmet had tilted forward and I could see his neck. I didn't suppose he would bother me but just to make sure I picked up a paving stone and brought it down on the back of his neck. Then I got up and walked away.

"I don't know if they tried to shoot me—the other guards or the airplanes. There was still a lot of noise going on, I remember. I didn't feel frightened or brave. I didn't feel anything. I just walked in the direction of our lines. After about an hour I remember stopping and trying to light a pipe. But I couldn't do it—literally couldn't do it—because my hands were shaking so much."

"Oh, Richard, poor, poor—What did you do?" Mary cried.

"Do? I walked on. I had to get back to England and sanity, that's all I knew. I suppose I took precautions. I'd been taking them so long that it was second nature. But I don't remember what I did except walk on. They told me that I walked through a battle to get to our lines."

"It was fated, Richard. It was fated that you should come safely home," Mary whispered, close in front of him.

"Yes, they flew me back at once."

"To someone who could comfort you and make you well again."

"To an empty house. She hadn't waited for me. She had gone. It wasn't I who had escaped."

Mary stretched out her hand to Charrington. He took it and sat silent. They could not see his face in the darkness.

At last he rose to his feet and went below.

CHAPTER 11

TOBY AND Yeoman were off duty between midnight and four o'clock. For most of this period they thought their own thoughts in silence or dozed in the cockpit or the float. But the hour approached when they must go below to stand their watch.

Boyd came on deck. "Your turn now," he said. "But there is nothing to worry about. He hasn't moved all night."

"Where is he?" Toby asked.

"In the port-side bunk of the forward cabin. Marcus is in the other. He will come up as soon as one of you takes his place. The other stays in the saloon. We've got a small lamp burning."

Toby and Yeoman went below and a minute later Marcus came on deck. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply.

"I don't mind admitting I'm glad to be out of there."

"He was quiet enough," Boyd said.

"Too quiet. You weren't actually with him, and you had the light. I kept thinking of that German guard he killed with a paving stone."

They sat smoking in silence for half an hour or so. It was absolutely still. The white mist seemed to pad and support the yacht. It felt as if they were floating in it rather than on water.

At last Marcus said, speaking quietly as before, "One feels different up here. It's weird, but much better than in the cabin. One almost feels as if we were overdoing things."

"You aren't suggesting that we need not watch him?"

"Of course I'm not. But we will have to devise a less exacting method. No one has had any sleep at all tonight."

"It's an original routine—watches below instead of on deck to guard against a mutiny by the captain. It takes a little getting used to. But it may not last for long."

"How do you think he will behave, or won't we notice a change?"

"The one thing I'm sure about is that he will be changed," Boyd said. "He is a brilliant actor, but he wasn't acting last night. He was carried away by his own story. He escaped—and this time found a woman waiting for him."

"Then, if he has escaped—"

"Can he continue to believe it? You remember that last calm, how we all felt like prisoners."

"What exactly are you afraid of?" Marcus asked.

"Violence. I believe the key to his character is violence."

"You aren't suggesting tying him up?"

"No. Someone would get hurt or killed in the process. He's strong as a gorilla. Think of his life. It was his—call it emotional violence—which killed Heather. He was a master at the violent art of gunboat fighting. Heather told me about a night on leave when he shouted in his sleep: 'Drown them, kill the swine.'"

"And there was the guard he killed with the paving stone," Marcus said thoughtfully.

"Exactly. Having made that point I want to suggest something. It might take as much as a fortnight to reach Bermuda. We have got to get in touch with the outside world before that."

"But how—even if a ship or airplane came close enough? None of us understands flags or Morse."

"We must use the float."

"I don't quite follow—"

"No doubt they have given up searching for Mary and the other survivors of the airliner. But if a yellow float were seen, somebody would come to investigate. As soon as we see a ship or airplane that looks like passing within range, one or two of us—you and I, say—must get into the float and paddle as far from the yacht as possible. We would take with us that flare from the front of the cockpit. We'd catch their eye by igniting that. But it would be the float itself that would do the trick. Even if they thought the yacht was rescuing it, somebody would come dashing out from Bermuda to get the story. Film stars—even ones nobody has heard of—are not allowed to vanish without investigation."

Marcus said, "Suppose we didn't attract attention—what about Richard then?"

"We would be wisest to keep away from the yacht."

"We couldn't leave the others."

"It sounds callous, but somebody must, I think. And the others need not suffer. Charrington means to live now. So he wouldn't scuttle the yacht if he hadn't got the float."

Marcus looked troubled. "No, it isn't possible. It would look so damned like desertion."

After a little while Boyd asked: "Have you a better plan?"

"Frankly, no. But, Boyd, old boy, the scheme has got to be modified. We must bring the other two in on it."

"Charrington himself told us that the fewer people who know about an escape the better."

"I can't help that. In the course of the day I'll explain to Toby and Jack. And we'll draw lots. Before evening the two who are to go will have been chosen and briefed. But they don't go without my order. It's an emergency scheme."

"You don't feel there is an emergency already?"

"Personally, Boyd, I don't. I've known Richard longer than you have, and I dare say my life has given me more chance of seeing all sorts of men under all sorts of strains and stresses. Even the best ones can lose their heads sometimes, develop fixed ideas. But they never go wrong altogether. Richard is one of the best at heart. This woman is a softening influence he has missed since Heather died, since he was taken prisoner in fact. It's my personal bet that his confession will have done him a world of good. Given a breeze we'll sail into harbor all right and I'll be able to report to Meg—'All present and correct.'"

It was beginning to grow light. They could see the sails hanging limp as tarpaulins, the patches of mist writhing on the water like the white smoke of slowly burning garden fires.

"There is another thing I hope," Boyd said. "I hope that Heather comes back."

Marcus started. "I didn't expect you to say a thing like that."

"I'm learning from Jack. But it is not really so unscientific a remark. Without a breeze no yacht could show character. Wind is the spirit of a sailing boat." He put his hand on the tiller, which moved like a limb out of joint. "Without wind *Heather Mary* is dead. If I'd felt the old companionship I would not have suggested clearing off and not telling the others. We are all here because of Heather. We stand or fall on our attachment to her."

"I'm glad you said that," Marcus whispered. "I've felt the same. If the yacht were a live thing again—well, there might be a crisis but it would be an appropriate one, like the storm. . . . I suppose we would all be rather insensible if we had not got into this mood after so long aboard. After all, we were each of us very fond of Heather—and she of us, I think."

They sat in silence while the light grew, the mist patches vanishing like ghosts before the sun.

TOBY CAME on deck. "Any wind?"

"Not a breath. What is the Skipper doing?"

"His eyes are open, but he is just staring at the ceiling. He's—it's hard to express, but he reminded me of a warrior lying in state. I wonder if he is putting it on."

Before anyone could say more, Charrington came on deck, followed by Yeoman. As Toby had said, it was difficult to define his expression. His face was drawn and tired but there was nothing hard in it. More slowly than usual he looked at the sails and round the circle of the horizon. "Still no wind," he said.

"Do you think the weather will change?" Marcus asked.

"The glass is steady. But it must blow soon. Good lord, I want to arrive. Where is Mary?"

"Still sleeping."

"Let her sleep." Suddenly he asked, "Did we drink a lot last night, Marcus?"

"Nothing. Do you feel bad?"

"As if I'd had my whole inside cut out. What did we do last night?"

"Nothing much. We were yarning."

"What did I talk about?"

Marcus hesitated. "You told us how you escaped from Germany," he said at last.

"Did I? I thought so, but wasn't sure if I'd dreamed it. I've never spoken of that to a living soul . . . I'm glad I've got it off my chest at last."

All of them were busy trying to hide their interest in Charrington. All except Marcus felt it was too good to be true.

Charrington filled his pipe, his fingers working automatically while his eyes stared forward over the yacht's bows.

"Can anybody give me a light?" he asked.

Toby held his lighter for him, and then pocketed it again.

"Thank you," Charrington said. "There is something I want to speak to you about before Mary appears." There was a hint of embarrassment in his voice. "We have been shipmates nearly three months now. As you know it's the first time I've had a crew since the war. If I've behaved strangely sometimes, kept things from you or lost my temper, I want to apologize. I have a hell of a temper. You know what I've had on my mind. But I want to finish this voyage well. It's rather important."

A few minutes later Mary Brown came running up the companionway. "Good morning, everybody, am I late?" she said, turning herself about like a mannequin.

Her auburn hair, for the first time uncovered since they had lifted her from the sea, hung to her shoulders, glossy in the sun. Her face was bright and confident. She was no longer wearing men's clothes. She had made her own skirt presentable and she had on a jersey which might have come straight from Bond Street. It was navy blue. It fitted her almost too well and had a white *M* embroidered over the heart.

She stood in front of Charrington, showing herself off, caressing the jersey with her hands. "I found this in a drawer. You don't mind, Richard? I think it must have been made for me."

Charrington stared at her while the others waited. At last he said: "Sit down, you little minx, and have your breakfast."

Marcus and Boyd exchanged glances.

ALL MORNING they were busy. Boyd worked on the little engine. The rest of them were engaged in tidying, polishing, splicing. It gave them a curious sensation doing these little beautifying tasks to a yacht which lay dead on a dead ocean.

Marcus, true to his word, found an opportunity to speak to Toby and Yeoman in the bow. He explained the plan and made each of them draw from his hand a folded strip of paper. On some excuse, under the eyes of Charrington, who still sat in the middle of the deck, Boyd came forward and did the same. By noon each of them knew what was to be done in an emergency, or at the perfect opportunity, and whether he himself was to do it or not.

While they were eating lunch on deck an aircraft passed, a silver speck moving along the sky. But it was too far off. Marcus shook his head. It would have been difficult in any case, for the girl was in the float and Charrington near her. Besides—everything was going so well.

Toward evening, Boyd had reassembled the generator engine. They would have lights that night. Marcus was throwing buckets of water on the deck while Yeoman scrubbed. They felt a breath of wind. Marcus licked his finger and held it up. The breeze was coming from the southeast—from the perfect direction—but it was too weak to fill the sails.

"It will grow stronger," Charrington said. "Tomorrow we will move."

This hope made them halt in their tasks, light cigarettes and talk. Toby, into whose head a few neat phrases had come, sat down to write them in his notebook.

Mary came over to him. "Are you writing about me?" she asked.

"No, but I will if you like. What shall I say?"

"Be serious, Toby," she laughed. "I'll have to give lots of interviews when I arrive. I won't have the least idea what to say unless you tell me."

"Tell them about your early life—they always lap that up. Did you ever run away and get lost when you were a child?"

They sat together, the youngest pair by many years, joking and laughing. Toby knew how to make her laugh. Charrington watched them.

Boyd tinkered with the engine for half an hour—until it was working better than it had ever done before. Then he stood up and smiled down at it, his head slightly on one side. He lit a cigarette and became conscious of the evening—a little more mist but no more wind, and no sign of the airplane or ship.

"I'm going to have another glance at the batteries," he said to Toby.

"O.K.," said Toby, who was still talking to Mary.

Passing through the saloon, Boyd saw that Marcus was already asleep. He went on into the galley and tested the batteries. They were charging. Boyd relaxed. He looked through the open door at the sleeping soldier on the bunk. Marcus's stern and clean-cut face was twitching. Boyd wondered why.

Marcus was dreaming. It was a reminiscent dream about an incident which he did not like to remember when he was awake and which returned as a nightmare when he was particularly tired or nervous. Its origin was a civil riot in the Far East when he had sent his men out armed with pick helves. There was a confused surging and shouting. From out of the darkness a native rushed at him with a knife. Marcus had no time to do anything. He saw the long blade flash and braced his chest to receive it. But at that moment the native collapsed. Marcus could not see what had happened, but he knew by the noise.

A pick helve brought down on a bare human head makes a

noise unlike any other—one could not mistake it even in a dream.

But he was no longer dreaming.

He swung off the settee. He saw Boyd in the galley doorway.

"What was that?" he shouted.

"Someone closed the hatch," Boyd said. "And I think they must be resetting the sail. Toby is on deck—"

Marcus turned away from him and ran for the companionway.

MARCUS tugged the hatch open but found something else blocking the way—the whole weight of the trysail. He struggled with the hard and heavy canvas. Meanwhile Boyd ran back through the saloon and the galley where he collided with Yeoman. Together they tried to open the forward hatch—until Yeoman remembered that he had put the cover over it before he and Marcus washed down the deck. Back to the saloon—it was as it had been in the storm except that the exit they had then used was battened down. And the danger was different. There was no sound of wind and waves. The noise of the engine had stopped and in its place was the crackling roar of fire.

The only chance was the main hatch. Marcus's legs were disappearing as he squirmed under the canvas. They followed. It was stifling hot—and they didn't know which way to go. The weight pressed them down. They wriggled like rats in a sack. At last they emerged, one after the other, on the edge of the deck.

A column of yellow and orange flame was spurting like a volcano out of what had been the engine casing. Marcus was already tugging the sail over it. Boyd and Yeoman helped him.

The flames went through the sail as if it had been paper. The three men dragged the forward part into place, but that went brown and black and vanished, too.

"Water," Yeoman said breathlessly, looking at the sea.

"No good. More canvas." Marcus jumped for the sail locker.

There was another jib and the topsail and the balloon staysail. Dragging canvas out of a confined space quickly must be one of the most exhausting tasks there is. In their desperation they did it in a moment. But instead of being stifled the pillar of flame consumed this, also.

They had no time or breath to speak, but they were all conscious of the water, the endless useless water, waiting for them when they had to jump from the heat.

Then the flame drew back like a tongue into a mouth.

"That's the end of the gasoline," Boyd gasped. "Thank God I didn't put much in."

But it was not the end of the fire. The woodwork all around the engine was well alight.

"Water now!"

It was difficult to get the sea water on deck in any quantity. They fetched pots and pans from the galley, lay on the deck and scooped them full. But the effect was pitiable. Then Boyd, running through the saloon with the swill bucket, noticed Marcus's blanket. He snatched it up, and others from under the mattresses. They dipped these over the side and dropped them on the fire. They had an effect, checking the burning while the men threw on more water. Smoke poured up where flames had been.

"I think it's under control," Marcus said.

"One or two more blankets. There must be some in the Skipper's cabin."

Yeoman went to fetch them. He was back in a moment.

"It's burning there!" he shouted.

That was harder to deal with because it was farther from the sea. They tried to stifle the flames and glowing wood with dry bedding, but the cloth smoldered and became so hot that they could not handle it. Then Marcus thought of the spare fresh-water tank. He turned on the tap and soaked a pillow and the mattress. That was enough to check the fire. By then the others had fetched buckets and saucepans of sea water. The cabin was so full of smoke that they choked and their eyes ran—but they could see no more fire. They went on deck again.

There they found Toby sitting against the mast. He looked at them with his eyes screwed up and his forehead deeply wrinkled.

"What the hell's been going on?" he asked.

"What happened to you?" Marcus asked. He looked at Toby, as they all did, with interest but without sympathy. They had been through too much themselves.

"The Skipper told me to reset the trysail in case the wind—did something," Toby said slowly. "I loosed the halyards. Then something exploded in my head."

Boyd examined his head. The skin was broken and a bruise was coming up like a balloon. But it was not bleeding much. His thick hair had saved him.



Yeoman had picked up the dinghy's tiller from the deck and was pointing with it. "There they are. Good riddance."

The float was a hundred yards ahead. Its little sail was set and with the zephyr of a breeze it was drawing away from the helpless yacht. They could see Charrington and Mary lying aboard it. It appeared to Boyd that the girl was strapped down.

"Do you suppose he forced her over the side?" Marcus asked.

"That wouldn't be difficult for him—particularly when the fire started," said Boyd.

This extraordinary sight—the Skipper running away from his ship and crew—affected them remarkably little. Their eyes were red and sore, they were still coughing the smoke out of their lungs, their burns were beginning to hurt. Charrington had tried to murder them, but in spite of his cunning he hadn't succeeded. Yeoman was right: it was good riddance.

They were more impressed by the position of the sun—still well above the horizon. It seemed as if they had fought the fire for hours, but the whole thing must have been over within a few minutes. . . . Then one of the slowly drifting mist masses engulfed the yacht, and they could see nothing more of their surroundings.

They helped Toby down to a bunk in the saloon. They cleaned themselves up a little and dressed their burns. Then, in the last of the daylight, they made a thorough examination of the cabin and cockpit, breaking away the charred wood to make certain that the fire was dead. Under the engine Boyd found the blackened tin container of the flare. That was how Charrington had started the fire—with the lifesaving flare.

While they were thus engaged, they heard an airplane. It must have passed almost directly over them but they could not see it for the mist. They discussed for a little while what Charrington had done and why he did it. He had fooled them properly. While they had been absorbed in their own secret plans, he had been quietly waiting to put a similar plan into operation.

"You have got to admire his single-mindedness," Boyd said. "He went straight on from where the wave, and then Mary, interrupted him—with improvements. He has made sure of the woman in this escape."

"I can see why he knocked out Toby. But why try to burn the yacht?"

"*Heather Mary*, his four deceivers—he would have destroyed

them all together, except for your quick reaction, Marcus. Another half minute and a red-hot engine would have dropped into the cabin. Then nothing could have saved us."

They paused and thought about that, feeling frightened. If the sides of the yacht had caught—

"Do you think he has escaped?" Marcus asked.

"He has a better chance than we have, now. If he doesn't reach Bermuda himself he will be spotted and picked up."

"But *Heather Mary* is still afloat, in spite of him," Yeoman said.

They were too tired to think of the details of their situation. When darkness came they fell asleep.

Dawn came, gray and bleak. The state of the yacht shocked them. There was a black hole where the cockpit used to be. The drooping jib accentuated the lack of other sails. Tendrils of mist groped through the empty rigging, and around the broken mast. The masses of the mist writhed and rolled over on themselves as they slid along the smooth surface of the water. Even the familiar ocean appeared strange and sinister. Mist changes everything.

"No wind—no sails—a leaking yacht. Two hundred miles from land, we think—from a little island we probably couldn't find anyway. It's a pity we didn't act first," Toby said.

They sat in silence in the saloon.

Yeoman came running down the companionway and burst into the saloon, his round face beaming.

"It's come back," he said excitedly.

"What—the float?"

"No, the white bird."

"Oh!"

"What is the weather doing?" Marcus asked.

"Thick as anything. But it came quite close—the bird, I mean. It's flying around the yacht."

"Any minute now we'll hear a woman crying," Toby said.

Yeoman stared at him, then broke out. "Don't you understand? Can't you feel it? It's not just the bird, it's Miss Heather. Now that woman's gone she's come back. She's come back to look after us. The jib is full and the yacht's moving. It's alive. She's at the tiller—you can feel it."

They looked at him in silence. No one felt inclined to say anything cynical.

"I don't suppose we are moving very fast," Marcus said at last,

gently. "We are a long way from land, you know, or a shipping route even."

"It wouldn't matter if we were in the middle of space —"

An overwhelming noise burst on them, blaring, deafening, breathlessly aggressive as the tumbling snow of an avalanche, filling the yacht, their ears, their heads. It swept them, stunned and terrified, out of the saloon. . . . A thing like a cliff was bearing down on them.

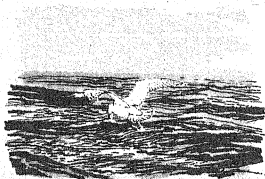
THIS is how it appeared from the deck of the big ship.

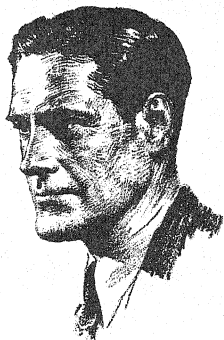
The little yacht appeared out of the mist so close that the officer on watch only had time to blow the foghorn and order "Hard aport." Even so he might have avoided a collision if the yacht had held her course. But as her crew came tumbling on deck, and before they could reach the helm, she veered to starboard and raced straight at the liner's side. One had the impression of a desperate but deliberate act.

As her bowsprit struck she rose straight upright and then disappeared as an entity. The men were catapulted through the air.

Next their heads and startled faces were framed in tumbling water. They seemed to race away astern. Very soon they were only dots on the smooth surface far behind. Then they were lost sight of in the mist.

A big ship at full speed takes over two miles to stop. But the officer of the launch which was lowered and sent back had no difficulty in finding the swimming men because of a giant petrel which glided to and fro above them.





J. M. Scott

J. M. SCOTT was born in Egypt, where his father was an English judge in the Mixed Courts. He was graduated from Cambridge University in 1928, and while trying to decide on a profession joined an exploring expedition to Labrador. This adventure appealed to him so much that the next year he went to Greenland to assist in mapping an air route between Europe and America. In 1933 he was secretary to the Mount Everest Expedition. Subsequently he settled down to work for *The Daily Telegraph* of London until World War II. He served in the 5th Scots Guard Ski Battalion and became commandant of the Mountain Warfare School in Italy. After the war, he worked with the British Council in northern Italy and in Yugoslavia, but since 1948 he has concentrated entirely on his writing.

Mountains and the sea have long held a great fascination for him. *The Will and the Way* and *The Other Half of the Orange* are novels laid in the Swiss Alps, and *Sea Wyf*, like *Heather Mary*, is a suspense novel of the sea.

Mr. Scott has loved sailing since childhood. The yacht *Heather Mary* is drawn to the actual specifications of a boat he once owned and sailed.

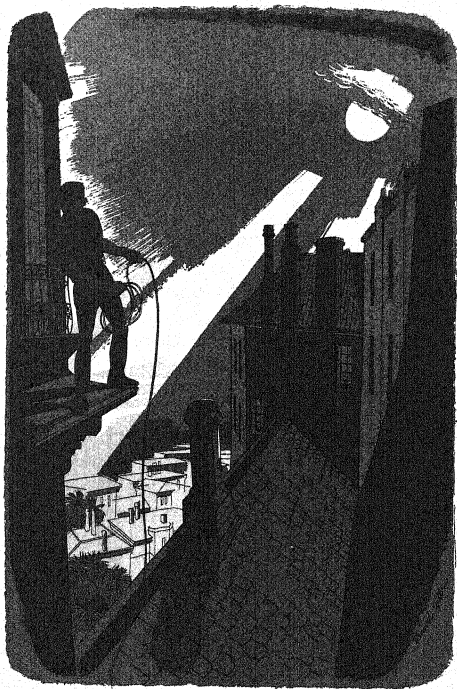
To Catch a Thief

A condensation of the book by

DAVID DODGE



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Illustrations by Denver L. Gillen

TO CATCH a thief, the proverb goes, you must set a thief. On the glamorous, opulent Riviera an acrobatic jewel thief is loose—and John Robie, whose own past can't stand investigation, must find the culprit to save his own skin. Through luxury hotels, Mediterranean villas and Monte Carlo's famed gambling casino the dogged chase goes on.

Against a Côte d'Azur backdrop as vivid as a travelogue, *To Catch a Thief* unfolds a story which is pure entertainment, peopled with a host of colorful characters: Maude Stevens, the Texas oil millionairess, whose diamonds are an invitation to larceny; smiling Bellini, whose pipelines to the French underworld are so useful; Danielle, a bikinied blonde with unusual ambition; and Mr. Paige, the shrewd, dry British insurance agent who gives a surprise twist to the denouement.

David Dodge's unusual tale provides the excitement of a first-class mystery coupled with a colorful trip through one of the world's most romantic settings.

CHAPTER 1

THE *agents de police* came for John Robie sooner than he expected them.

It was a hot, still summer evening in August. Crickets sawed at their fiddles in the grass and a bullfrog who lived in a pool at the bottom of the garden boomed an occasional bass note. John was burning letters in the fireplace when first the crickets, then the bullfrog stopped their music. His setter, sleeping on the rug, woke suddenly and cocked her ears, but he did not need the dog's help. The crickets were better watchmen.

He had already changed his clothes and buttoned his passport and billfold into the inside pocket of his jacket. He was ready to leave the house. He kicked the ashes in the fireplace, crumbling them, before he went into the kitchen. The setter growled, deep in her throat.

Germaine, his cook, was making a ragout, peering nearsightedly into the big iron pot on the stove and muttering to herself.

He said, "Germaine."

"M'sieu?" She still peered into the pot.

"I'm going away. Dinner won't be necessary."

She looked up at that, surprised and indignant. He had no time to tell her more. He said, "*Au revoir*," and ran up the back stairs. The dog growled again, more loudly.

He had one path of escape open to him. It was not the easiest, but it would do. It will leave no doubt in their minds, if there is any doubt, he thought. The dog was barking steadily by the time the doorbell rang, and he heard Germaine's loose slippers slap across the hall. He stepped out on the little *terrasse* where he slept on hot nights, climbed the low railing, balanced himself for a moment, and jumped.

In mid-air John saw the upturned face of the man in the garden below. The *agent* was too startled to shout, at first.

It was a fine jump. John had it all timed and precalculated. The branch was there when he reached for it, flat out on his face and stretching. As his feet went down he bent at the hips, kicked hard on the upswing, let go while he was still rising, arched his back and went over the top of the high garden wall with inches to spare. He came down on his toes in the middle of the lane beyond the wall, and was running toward the shelter of the orchard at the top of the hill before the *agent* let out his first shout.

From the orchard on the top of the hill he turned his back on the Villa des Bijoux. It was hard to think he would never see the villa again. There were many things in it he hated to leave behind, many ties to a good life; it was all finished and done with.

He knew the country well, and he knew all of the South of France well, even to the odors. Most of the farmers who were his neighbors cultivated patches of flowers to sell to the perfume factories at Vence or Grasse.

It was a ten-kilometer walk to Cros de Cagnes and the Route Nationale, where he could catch a bus. At the bus station he bought a copy of *Nice-Matin* to hide his face. There was nothing about him in the newspaper. It would be still another twenty-four hours before the French papers picked up the *Paris Herald Tribune's* lead and spread it across the front page with headlines and photographs. He thought he would be safely out of the public eye before that happened; or on his way to a French prison. One or the other.

There was only a single passenger on the bus when he boarded it. He would not have given her a second thought except that caution made him observant, and she was clearly out of place on a rattletrap Route Nationale bus. She was dressed for the evening; a long gown, fragile, spike-heeled slippers, a fur wrap. He knew enough about furs to guess that the price of her wrap alone would buy an expensive car and pay the salary of a man to drive her wherever she wanted to go. She was one of a type he knew well, had made it his business to know.

Force of habit made him look at her fingers and ear lobes. Afterward he watched her until a movement of her shoulders opened the wrap far enough to let him see her throat. She wore neither rings, necklace, earrings, nor, as far as he could see, any



jewelry, not even a wrist watch. It was not in keeping with the wrap, any more than the wrap was in keeping with her presence on the bus.

He wondered if the explanation could be that she had lost her jewelry to a thief. It was incongruous that he might be fleeing from the police on the same bus with one of the women whose losses had set the police on his trail.

The bus filled gradually. When it reached the end of its run opposite the big pink stucco casino in Cannes, he lost sight of the girl and did not think of her again.

He joined the strollers along the promenade of La Croisette, the boulevard skirting the beach, keeping to the beach side, where

the lights were dim. He crossed the boulevard only when he was opposite the shabby front of the Hotel Napoleon.

The Napoleon was a poor distant cousin to the newer, more fashionable hotels which faced La Croisette farther up the beach near the casino and the yacht harbor. The faded red carpet had a new patch since his last visit. Bellini's sign near the elevator still advertised the same services in the same three languages. The English part of the sign read:

HENRI BELLINI

Insurance—Sales and Rentals—Tourist Agents
Imports and Exports—Domestic Help
Interpreter—Stenographer
Investments

An arrow pointed up the stairway to the mezzanine floor.

BELLINI was reading the Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* in the cluttered cubbyhole that served him as an office. He did not move when he heard the doorknob turn. The door had a spring lock and could be opened from the outside only with a key, but he always left the key in the outside lock, except when he had confidential business to transact in the room.

John brought the key with him when he entered. He put it on the corner of Bellini's desk.

Bellini took off his spectacles and peered at him, smiling his ingratiating smile of welcome.

"I was wondering when I would hear from you," he said, chuckling. "Have you seen this very interesting article in the newspaper?" He tapped his stubby finger on the paper.

John said, "I've read it."

Bellini chuckled again.

He had not changed in the months since John had seen him. He always looked the same: small, round, oily and happy. A German soldier had broken his shoulder with a rifle butt during the Occupation. The bones had not been set properly, so the shoulder stayed hunched up around his ear in a permanent half shrug, and one arm was shorter than the other. He wore heavy horn-rimmed glasses that made him look like an owl.

He never stopped smiling, and no one could say anything re-

motely humorous in his presence without earning an appreciative titter. His manners were excellent, and he had never been known to break his word. In addition to his legitimate business activities, he was an importer of smuggled goods, a black-market operator and a dealer in stolen property. He was careful to carry on through intermediaries, and, since he commanded the absolute loyalty of everyone who worked for him, he had never been arrested nor had his reputation as an honest businessman been challenged publicly. He was John Robie's best friend.

John said, "I'm leaving the country. Can you fix this for me?"

He took the passport from his pocket. Bellini looked briefly at the passport, then up at him again, still beaming.

"What do you want done to it?"

"Change the number and name, set my birthday back ten years, and alter the date on the entry stamp so it won't be more than three months old when I leave. I'll dye my hair, pad myself around the middle, and have a new photograph taken. The only pictures they have of me are newspaper prints, and those date back to before the war. They won't have any reason to look twice at a middle-aged tourist. Once I'm out of the country, I'm safe."

"You are not afraid of extradition?"

"I'm not that important. When they learn that I've left the country, and the thief keeps operating, they'll see their mistake."

"Will the thief keep operating after you leave, John?"

"There'll be no reason for him to stop."

Bellini chuckled, blinking wisely behind the spectacles.

John said, "Did you think that Le Chat had come back?"

Bellini lifted his good shoulder to the level of his crippled shoulder, then let it drop again. "It's been a long time since I saw you last. A man might change his mind."

"It isn't Le Chat."

Bellini nodded, satisfied. "I was waiting to hear you say it yourself. Now, what can you do about this story in the newspaper?"

"What I told you. Run. It doesn't leave me any other choice."

ROBIE KNEW how soon the other papers would take up the cry. He had caught their attention before, although not as John Robie. French reporters, who coin a nickname for every public figure, named him Le Chat after his first thefts in 1936, at Nice and Menton. In the months that followed and until his

imprisonment in 1939, only the gathering war clouds over Europe received more space in the French press than he did.

He was a thief who made good newspaper copy. He was never known to employ violence or carry a weapon more dangerous than a glass cutter, never stole anything but cash and jewelry, always operated alone and was never identified, except by his nickname, until a receiver of stolen property in Paris turned him in to the Sûreté Nationale after an argument over the price to be paid for a necklace of pigeon-blood rubies. The insurance companies' losses from the activities of Le Chat in the South of France for three years amounted to the equivalent of three quarters of a million dollars, in various currencies. The several receivers who bought stolen stones from him never paid more than forty percent of insurable value, sometimes less, but he had nearly eight million francs, then worth \$250,000, in several banks under several names when he was arrested.

The police never learned about the money and he wasted none of it on expensive lawyers. He had no defense worth presenting. The Sûreté agents who broke into his Paris hotel room had taken him while he was unsetting the stones from the necklace which belonged to the wife of a member of the Chamber of Deputies. Because the theft had taken place on the Côte d'Azur, they brought him back to Nice and tried him there before the Cour d'Assises.

The newspapers gave the trial front-page coverage. He was good copy to the end. He admitted nothing and offered no information about himself. He had no identity papers. The reporters knew that he was a young man, suspected from his accent that he was an American and were reasonably certain, as much from the muscular development of his body as from his technique as a thief, that he was a trained gymnast, possibly a professional acrobat. The evidence that was not admitted in court got into the newspapers easily, along with some imaginings not far from the truth; the story, sworn to by the servant girl who had seen it and raised the alarm, of his jump from the roof of a villa in Eze to the ground forty feet below, and his bounding leap from there over an eight-foot wall; another story, solemnly reported in the French way, of a woman who had lost diamonds worth \$20,000 and wakened in time to see Le Chat, in dead-black clothing, spread his arms and fly out the window with the stones, like a bat.

They sent him to serve his sentence at La Maison Centrale de Fontevrault-l'Abbaye, near Saumur. He arrived there a few months before the outbreak of World War II. He had been in prison less than a year when the German Army arrived to take over the management of that part of the country.

La Maison Centrale was full of cutthroats; a few thieves, like himself, but more murderers, gangsters and apaches, one step removed from the criminals who were sent to Devil's Island. The Germans considered them good material to pass over into the care of what remained of the Third Republic. One night the entire population of La Maison Centrale was herded into trucks, driven into the Unoccupied Zone and turned loose.

It was one of several German errors. All the murderers, Frenchmen first and cutthroats only incidentally, went into the maquis and began practicing their trade on German soldiers. John, with no place else to go, joined the others.

He met Bellini in the maquis. Bellini, in spite of his Italian name, was French, a Niçois. When he learned the identity of Le Chat from John's jailmates, he asked, "Do you have plans to return to the Côte after this business is finished? Because if you do, I must warn you. You were a great inconvenience to me. I would have enjoyed betraying you to the Sûreté. Or having you strangled. Every time you made a theft, my organization felt the heavy hand of the law."

"I plan to return, but not as a thief."

"You have reformed, then? A wonderful thing to hear. I have always contended that the French prison system had its points."

John shook his head and smiled. Bellini amused him.

"Retired is a better word," he said. "I have all the money I need. Now that they know my face, I'm no longer safe. I've seen all of the French prison system that I want to see."

"Good. Good. I am glad to hear it. I should not like to be your business rival."

They both laughed. John said, "We would make better partners, I think."

They made good partners in the maquis. Bellini was not a jailbird like the others, only a businessman with useful connections in *le milieu*, the French underworld. The Germans wanted him to use his connections on their side. When he refused, they broke his shoulder instead of shooting him, another error.

He organized his own band of *maquisards*, all Boche killers. John, the only one among them without a Frenchman's inborn hatred for German invaders, caught it in time from the others. Because of the strength in his arms and shoulders, John was most often called on to strangle sentries or to climb quickly and quietly when climbing was necessary.

After the fighting had ended, John, who had been wounded twice, neither time seriously, left France for the United States. He had no difficulty getting out of the country. To enter the United States without papers, he had to show that he was an American citizen, which he did by proving that he had been born in New York State. His birth certificate was enough. After establishing his nationality, he applied for a passport and returned to France on the first boat.

It was not recklessness. Bellini wrote that the Sûreté had made no attempt to round up the convicts of La Maison Centrale. The prison records had been destroyed by the Germans, and it was common knowledge in *le milieu* that no man who had killed Germans during the Occupation need worry about an unfinished prison term as long as he remained respectable. John intended to remain respectable. To do so, he needed the money that still stood to his credit in the French banks.

The franc had deteriorated badly and was still tumbling. He found that he was worth less than \$50,000 instead of a quarter of a million, and that rigid currency controls made it impossible for him to take the money out of the country. Still, eight million francs was a comfortable fortune in France, and he liked France. He stayed.

He had used his own name on the passport. No one questioned him. He bought the villa and called it the Villa of the Jewels because a name was needed on the mailbox and the joke was a harmless one. He registered at the prefecture in Nice, where he had been convicted, and applied for a *permis de séjour* as a resident. The card came through, and still nobody asked if John Robie of the Villa des Bijoux was the thief of the same name who had been sentenced to twenty years at La Maison Centrale for jewel robbery. Finally, after he had been at the villa for several months, the Vence *commissaire de police* came to call on him, riding a bicycle and puffing because of the steepness of the hill.

The *commissaire* was a short broad man with sharp eyes and a

soft voice. His name was Oriol. John gave him a glass of wine. He took one sip to be polite, and did not touch it again. His eyes wandered around the room. "You are very comfortable here, at the Villa des Bijoux, Monsieur Robie."

From the way he said it, John realized that he knew. He went on slowly, "I hope you continue to be comfortable here, monsieur. I know of your record—with the maquis, I mean. I was in the maquis myself, for a time. Before that, I was a police clerk. At the Cour d'Assises in Nice."

John waited. Oriol thought for a while, working out his sentences, before he said, "I recommended that the *permis de séjour* be given to you, Monsieur Robie. My recommendation was enough. There will be no further investigation of your background at present."

"I'm very grateful. What do you mean by 'at present'?"

Oriol turned over his hands, palms up. "I mean that there is nothing I know of now which would require investigation. What you may do tomorrow or the next day is, of course, another thing. If you were to attract official attention to yourself in any way, then I, as *commissaire*, would ask more questions than I have asked."

He stood up. They shook hands, and the *commissaire* pedaled away down the hill. John felt really secure for the first time since his return.

He continued on friendly terms with Oriol and through him met others of his neighbors, peasants and villagers and minor government functionaries. He began playing *boule* with them in the village on Sundays. When the Grasse *boule* team challenged them to a match, he went up to Grasse to help defend the village honor, and was paired off against a big broad-shouldered man who introduced himself simply as Paul. He was the most popular man on the Grasse team, and their best player; likable, quiet, friendly. John thought he might be the village blacksmith. He was surprised to hear that Paul was le Comte du Pré de la Tour.

They were friends from the beginning. Paul, several years younger than John, went by the name of du Pré, rarely using his title. John learned from Oriol that Paul's home was in Lyons, but he owned a little *domaine* in the hills above Grasse which he pretended to farm for profit, although he was independently wealthy. Actually the *domaine* was a summer rest home for his wife, Lisa, who was dying of tuberculosis. They were hopelessly in love, they

both knew she was dying, and they never spoke of it to each other. Paul spent as much of his time by her bedside as she would permit. After she had met John, and became aware of his friendship for her husband, she begged him to take Paul with him whenever he went on a hunting or fishing trip, which he did frequently.

"Get him away from me, John," she would say, with tears in her eyes. "Keep him occupied. Don't let him think about me. I'm afraid of what will happen to him when I die."

"You're not going to die, Lisa. Don't talk that way."

"I'm not afraid for myself, John. I'm afraid for Paul. Help him to find something, somebody, to take my place, John. Be his friend."

For her sake, and because he genuinely liked Paul, he cultivated Paul's company. They hunted together, went on fishing trips, and, during a trying period when Lisa was confined in a Swiss sanitarium and Paul was unable to visit her, attempted the stony peak of the Jungfrau. Paul and the guide who took them were experienced mountain climbers, but John, who had never been on a rock face before, surprised them both. His strength, climbing skill, and immunity to the vertigo that bothers beginners made Paul question him later. He evaded an explanation. Paul, seeing his reluctance to talk about himself, did not ask again.

It was three years before Lisa died. Paul was quieter now than before, and smiled less often. When the Russians first moved in Asia, Paul had gone to Lyons to volunteer for the French contribution to the United Nations troops, and was rejected because of the plate in his knee, a souvenir of his service with the Free French. He wrote John a curt, unhappy note. But John had no time to worry about Paul. Oriol paid him a second official visit on the same day that Paul's letter arrived.

He had been on a solitary fishing trip. It was a good day. He was covered with fish scales and sunburn, and had brought back enough of a catch for Germaine to make a bouillabaisse. He had not seen the newspapers.

Oriol said, "Did you ever, during your time with the maquis, hear of a man named Le Chat, John?"

John felt the sweat start along his ribs and on his back.

He said, "I know the name."

Oriol took a folded newspaper out of his pocket and held it out, his sharp eyes watching John's face. "He was a famous jewel thief. We think he may be operating here on the Côte."

John looked at the paper.

A Mme. Lisieux, staying at one of the resort hotels in Menton, had lost jewels valued at three million francs to a thief who got in through the window of her top-floor suite during the night by swinging himself down from the cornice of the roof. Most of the article was about the thief's boldness and physical agility. Clearly the man who wrote it had never heard of Le Chat, because the comparison was a natural one to make. Le Chat's name was not mentioned.

He returned the paper to Oriol. Oriol looked at him woodenly as he folded it. John said, "I remember reading about Le Chat years ago. This man's technique seems much the same. But it isn't the same thief. Le Chat was killed during the Resistance. I was there when he died."

Oriol said nothing. John wanted to take him by the arm and say, "I swear it. I like being an honest man. I wouldn't steal again if I starved. All I want is to live my life, drink my wine, dig in my garden and be let alone." But he could not say anything so bald. The amnesty that let him live peacefully at the Villa des Bijoux was not an official one. Legally, he was still an escaped convict, and Oriol a *commissaire de police*.

Oriol went away on his bicycle, still looking solemn. As a maquis fighter himself, and a fellow *boule* player, he wanted to give John the benefit of every doubt. But he was not overtrusting, and because he alone knew John's identity and had taken upon himself the responsibility of extending the universally recognized but legally nonexistent amnesty, he watched the Villa des Bijoux for several nights. There were no further thefts. Oriol abandoned the night watch.

John read the newspapers every day. The Korean war pushed local crimes off the front page for several weeks, until the climbing thief moved back into the news.

Three villas were robbed in five days. They were all in the same neighborhood, in or near St. Jean on Cap Ferrat, and the total value stolen amounted to twenty-two million francs, about \$60,000. All three thefts bore the trademarks of the same daring, agile thief. An arrest, any arrest, was demanded by the newspapers. Still no one thought to bring up the name of Le Chat. There was nothing John could do but follow the newspaper reports and hope for the thief's arrest.

Two weeks later there were new headlines. A hotel room in Monte Carlo was entered and robbed. The theft was spectacular. The thief left footprints on the marquee over the main hotel entrance, and marks on the front of the building to show where he had climbed one of the chains supporting the marquee. The window he wanted to enter had been closed and locked, but he had cut the pane away with a glass cutter. He had left behind only a crescent of glass cut from the windowpane, with a small piece of adhesive tape attached, and no fingerprints.

John knew that it would be only a matter of time after that. The thief had duplicated, almost action for action, one of Le Chat's boldest thefts, even to the use of tape to keep the cut glass from falling. It was as if he were inviting a comparison.

The Paris edition of the *New York Herald Tribune* finally made the connection between new thief and old. If it had been *Nice-Matin* or one of the other local papers, he would not have escaped when he did.

The *Herald Tribune* reached Riviera newsstands about noon, and the mailman delivered a copy with the afternoon mail. The newspaper headline was: HAS LE CHAT RETURNED? Underneath there was a blurry picture of himself, taken in the courtroom of the Cour d'Assises in 1939. The article which went with the picture put a series of questions, only suggesting some of the answers. Was it true, as rumored, that Le Chat and other notorious criminals had been released from prison by the Germans, but that, because of their good record with the Liberation forces, the Sûreté had extended an amnesty against their further imprisonment? Was this what accounted for the failure of the police to make a single arrest in connection with the latest thefts? Had Le Chat truly returned, and was he immune from arrest?

John knew that Oriol, who spoke no English, would not ordinarily look at an English-language newspaper, but it could not be long before he heard of the story. John's arrest and return to prison would follow automatically, whether or not the real thief continued his activity.

He changed his clothes, burned his letters, took the money he kept in the house for an emergency, and left the Villa des Bijoux by way of the *terrasse* and the tree when the *agents de police* came for him. Now, with Bellini's help, he meant to leave France. He had no further plans.

BELLINI, peering at him wisely under the green shade of his reading lamp, his round, happy face shining with sweat, said, "If you leave, you can never come back. You realize that, don't you? Once the Sûreté brings the old charge out in the open . . ."

"It's out in the open now. That's why I'm leaving."

"Never to see *la belle France* again?"

Only a Frenchman could imply so much with a single question.

"There's no other way. How soon can you have the passport ready?"

Bellini lifted his good shoulder. "Two days, except for the photograph."

"I'll take care of the photograph. Somebody else will have to find me luggage and clothes. Where can I stay, without papers?"

"Where else but with your friends? Let me think."

Bellini thought, smiling at nothing.

"It would not be wise to remain here with me," he said at last.

"There is Jean-Pierre? Le Borgne? Coco? No. They are all being watched. The police are making it difficult for everyone. I myself have had to suspend several of my more important activities."

"You and Le Borgne and Jean-Pierre and Coco and the others had better get together and do something about it."

"We have tried. Cautiously, of course, because at first we thought it might be you again, and one does not give an old comrade to the police, however inconsiderate he may be of his friends." Bellini chuckled. "We will have to try harder now. With this new thing"—he tapped the newspaper lying in front of him—"and the criticism of the police which will follow"—he gave his lopsided, one-shoulder shrug—"we must uncover him before he ruins us. Before Jean-Pierre and Coco and Le Borgne are back in prison and I am left alone with no one to help me." He beamed, his head cocked sideways. "We need your help, John."

Before John could speak, he lifted the hand of his crippled arm. "Let me finish. Whoever this thief is—and he will be hard to uncover, very hard—he has borrowed your style, your technique. He thinks as you did, robs as you used to, mocks the police with his actions as you mocked them. He is another Cat. You see what an opportunity it gives you? You could put yourself into his mind, plan his thefts, think a step ahead of him. . . ."

"I can't do it, Bellini. They're looking for me now. Not him. I have the whole sentence to serve if I go back. . . ."

"They would forget the prison sentence if you gave them this thief. He makes them ridiculous. . . ."

"They would forget about him if they could take me, too. They can *prove* that I'm Le Chat. If they find me . . ."

"What real risk will you run? You said yourself that they would not be looking for a middle-aged tourist. There are hundreds, thousands of middle-aged tourists here on the Côte for the season. You would not have to expose yourself. You remember once you said that we would have made good partners? That is it. All you have to do is think for us. . . ."

"And risk La Maison Centrale again if I slipped." John turned away. He walked to the window to look at the moon track lying across the calm sea. Two or three miles offshore the lights of a passing steamer winked across the water, heading south and west for Marseilles, Gibraltar, the Atlantic and America.

And safety, he thought.

"You need not slip, John," Bellini chuckled. "I am confident. I have already made preliminary plans for you. You will have to go to Marseilles for a few days, to Jean-Pierre, but all arrangements have been made for your return. I believe you will be able to work best here in Cannes, where we can keep in touch with each other. With your mind and my organization, it will be easy. Relatively easy, of course. Everything is relative."

John turned around.

"You were confident, weren't you?" he said, unsmiling.

Bellini giggled. "I am always confident of my friends. I find that loyalty repays loyalty."

He talked on, chuckling as he outlined the risks John must run, as if he were rehearsing some practical joke they meant to play on a friend. It was his way. He would giggle on his deathbed. But he was careful to overlook no detail that might be important, and John listened attentively. The knowledge that a slip would cost twenty years of his life kept his mind from wandering.

CHAPTER 2

A SÛRETÉ NATIONALE *agent* in plain clothes strolled along the sun-baked promenade of the Boulevard La Croisette. He was hot, his shirt stuck to his back, and he envied the seven-eighths-

naked vacationers sporting on the strip of beach ten feet below the promenade, coloring the beach with brief bright bathing suits and tanned bare arms and legs. Cannes in midsummer was no place for a man who had to wear clothes.

Passing the impressive front of the Hotel Midi, he made his usual inspection of the small patch of roped-off sand which was the hotel's private beach. The *agent* saw nothing that interested him professionally. A girl came across the boulevard from the hotel and went down to the beach wearing a zebra-striped bathing suit that was startling even for Cannes. He hesitated, but the man who followed her gave him a cold look. The *agent* walked on.

John Robie, sitting in one of the shaded deck chairs on the *plage privée*, put down his newspaper after the *agent* had passed.

He was used to the *agents* who strolled La Croisette. They were as methodical about it as patrolling sentries, and as much alike in their sport clothes as soldiers in uniform, or as the young men who came down to the beach in the afternoon with the girl in the startling bathing suit.

He watched the girl pull on a white bathing cap over her dark hair. She was the girl he had seen on the bus, Francie Stevens. Bellini had identified her from John's description. Her mother was an American widow who was staying at the Hotel Midi for the season. Her jewels were insured by a London insurance company for \$72,000. Mrs. Stevens seemed a highly probable victim for the thief, and John occupied himself considering how the jewelry could most easily be stolen. The girl interested him only because she was a factor to be considered in the theft.

She never wore jewelry herself, which puzzled him. It was no modesty on her part. The summer season on the Côte offered every woman an opportunity to make two displays; one of herself on the beach during the day, the other of her dress and ornament in the evening. Francie was noticeable on both occasions; on the beach because of her bathing suits, at other times because she wore no personal ornament of any kind, not even rings or a bracelet. This and her clear lack of interest in other things that brought most summer visitors to the Côte were puzzling. Otherwise she seemed like any other pretty girl. She had a good figure and the kind of Irish attractiveness that goes with blue eyes, a fair skin and dark hair. He thought she might be really eye-catching if she would make an effort to be.

He opened his paper to read the war news. The next *agent* would not come by for another hour. The strolling police, each of whom had a copy of a poor twelve-year-old photograph and a physical description of Le Chat, acrobat, thief and jailbird, never gave a second look at the balding, thick-bodied man who sat reading a newspaper in a deck chair on the beach in front of the Hotel Midi.

John's eyebrows were darker and bushier, and he was moderately convex through the middle instead of concave. Pads in his shoes increased his height and made him toe out when he walked enough to give him a flat-footed, slightly clumsy appearance. He wore tinted glasses occasionally, but so did most of the other hotel guests while they were on the beach. The sun glare was strong.

"It is a matter of camouflage, not disguise," Jean-Pierre had told him in Marseilles. "As we did in the maquis, one adopts the coloration of one's surroundings. One blends. In your case, we blend you into a clot of tourists, like a cook blending fish in a bouillabaisse. You no longer exist as an individual. You merely contribute to the background."

Jean-Pierre's wife sewed the light harness John wore next to his skin to change his body contours. "The main thing," Jean-Pierre said, "is to disguise the body. The Boches did you a favor when they burned your prison photographs, but the body is known. That is what they will watch for, so no disclosures on the beach. You must wear the harness at all times in public, and you must take the sun—all Americans do that at Cannes—but never the water. You have in your baggage modest shorts, knee length in the British style, and loose shirts with sleeves to the elbow. Wear those during the day. Be unobtrusive, but do not slink. When you meet an *agent* on the street, do not look at his eyes or at his feet, but over his shoulder. It gives one an honest, unconcerned air."

The name that went with his new identity and passport was Jack Burns. Mr. Burns was in the insurance business, he came from New York City, he was forty-four years old, and he had no distinguishing physical characteristics worth noting. His baggage bore the proper customs labels, and his wardrobe matched the wardrobes of several dozen other visitors of Mr. Burns's approximate age and financial status enjoying the pleasures of the summer on the Côte d'Azur. As Jean-Pierre had said, he contributed to the background.

He was not afraid of being recognized, unless by Oriol, and he hoped that Oriol was keeping quiet to protect his own position. A police *commissaire* who knew Le Chat's face not only as it had looked at the time of his trial but as it was twelve years afterward could be of great help to the Sûreté. He would first have to confess to the Sûreté that he had had Le Chat in his hands and let him go free, and he might not continue to hold his post as *commissaire* afterward. John had read *Nice-Matin* and *L'Espoir* carefully—in private; Mr. Burns did not read French—without finding any mention of the disappearance of John Robie from the Villa des Bijoux near Vence, or anything to connect his name with the thefts. He counted on Oriol's peasant caution to keep him from the confession.

John had no intention of making the acquaintance of Mrs. Stevens. But he wanted to be certain that the jewels she wore were those covered by the insurance policy and not copies.

Maude Stevens was in her early fifties, friendly, plump, and a heavy gambler at roulette. She had done her own washing and housework for the first thirty years of her life, helping her husband to scrape a living on a quarter section of worthless land in northern Texas. Her husband had died, her only child had been born, and the first of several oil wells had come in on the quarter section almost simultaneously. Since then, she had been repaying herself for the first thirty years. She liked her jewelry florid, preferring diamonds to other stones because of their sparkle, and she changed the pieces she wore from evening to evening, giving the world an opportunity to admire her entire collection, of which she was enormously proud.

John spent an evening standing behind her chair at a roulette wheel in the casino at Juan-les-Pins, leaning forward to make small bets on red or black whenever she placed her own counters so he could look unobtrusively at her rings. He won consistently on the red and black. Mrs. Stevens, who had been losing until then, began to cap his hundred-franc counters with her own larger bets, first ten thousand francs and then, as the luck held with them, up to the table limit of a hundred thousand. She won nearly two million francs. They were great friends before the luck changed.

He saw enough of her jewelry that evening to satisfy himself that she wore the originals, and he meant to avoid her afterward.

He found it almost impossible to do. On the evening of the day after their stroke of luck at roulette he went into the Midi's Petit Bar for the single cocktail which Mr. Burns allowed himself before dinner. She shouted at him from the table where she sat with Francie, and Francie's admirer of the moment.

"Lucky! Lucky Burns! Come over here! I want to buy you a drink."

He had to join them. Introducing him, she said, "This is the man I was telling you about, Francie. Mr. Lucky Burns, my daughter, Francie, this is Leon, don't bother getting up, Leon, sit down, Lucky, we're all in the family. Look!"

She showed him a pin she was wearing. It was a small diamond dog with emerald eyes and a diamond leash ending in an emerald safety clasp. He did not have to look at it closely. Even at a snap guess, it represented an investment of five or six thousand dollars. She said proudly, "I bought it this morning at Cartier's. It took all my winnings. The house will never get its money back now."

Mrs. Stevens, happy with her new jewel, kept moving the dog to new positions on her dress, until Leon said something about Le Chat. The *Herald Tribune* article was still a popular subject for discussion.

Mrs. Stevens scoffed at the suggestion that she had anything to worry about. "I keep my beads in the hotel safe," she said. "Besides, they're insured. And I've got my lucky dog to sick on any cat that comes around *me*."

She made a gesture of petting it and laughed. So did John and Leon. Francie smiled. She did not enter into the conversation. She was there at the table with them, nothing more.

John avoided the Petit Bar after that. He was very busy in the evenings, too busy to let himself be waylaid by Mrs. Stevens.

"Mrs. Stevens will do," he told Bellini, the day after she bought the diamond dog. "The others you had in mind won't attract a thief like Le Chat." He felt sure that Mrs. Stevens, glittering nightly at the casinos, would catch the thief's eye in time, but he continued to look for other baits.

One trap was good, a dozen were better. John had decided on a second logical victim for the thief and was hunting a third when the necklace of pigeon-blood rubies which had been the cause of his arrest in 1939 was stolen a second time from the wife of the member of the Chamber of Deputies.

IT WAS a bad blow to John. "I could have had him," he told Bellini. "He was bound to go after the rubies. They're irresistible. If I had known that necklace was in Nice"—he shook his head angrily—"I could have had him. It would all be over."

Another uproar followed the theft. Newspaper editorials attacking the Sûreté's incompetence continued for days. The thief had entered through a skylight which he reached by a dangerous climb up a drainpipe. He had cut a hole in the skylight with a glass cutter, lowered himself into the apartment on a rope and climbed the rope again to make his escape. Le Chat was offered to the readers of the newspapers at once as the public menace of the century and as a public benefactor exposing the stupidity and corruption of the Sûreté Nationale.

Lepic, the *commissaire divisionnaire* who had been sent down from Paris to take charge of the hunt for Le Chat, was a young man for his position, and he had arrived there by working hard at his job. He had no use for incompetence or sloppy police work, and he did not believe in luck, or very strongly in anything else except his own ability.

He called a conference of his chief assistants the day after the rubies were stolen. "Quoting *L'Espoir*, we are all as dumb as camels," he told them. He paused. "How many men do we have looking for Le Chat in Nice? Thirty? Forty? Fifty? All with copies of his picture, all with a physical description, all presumably alert to question anyone resembling him. And he laughs in our faces. If we have no brains, where are our eyes?"

He scowled at the only man who was not looking at the floor.

The man said, "It's been twelve years since the picture was taken. It was no good even then. Most of us never saw him in the flesh."

"I never saw him in the flesh myself. And I agree that the photo is a poor one. But I have his description here." Lepic slapped a piece of paper. "You all have it. This man's appearance has not changed so much in twelve years that he would be unrecognizable. I say it because Le Chat climbs drainpipes like Le Chat, and to do that he must be in the same physical condition that he was twelve years ago, or nearly so. I do not ask you to rely on a poor photograph, because it is not necessary. We have a description of him. How many men do you see outside of a circus who answer this description physically?"

He rattled the paper at them.

The man who had spoken before said, "None, or we would question them. He wears clothes to cover the body, as he probably wears whiskers and tinted glasses to hide his face."

There was a mumble of assent from the other men.

Lepic bared his teeth. He said softly, "So at a summer resort like Nice, where the whole world comes to take the sun and water, you cannot find a man with whiskers and tinted glasses who never appears in a bathing suit, always wears clothes covering him to the wrist and ankles, like an undertaker? In this weather."

There was no answer. One man shuffled his feet.

Lepic said, "That is all for the present. We have no brains. We have eyes. Let us try to use the eyes to the best of our ability. *Bon soir, messieurs.*"

JOHN SPENT several hours of every evening in the casinos nearest to Cannes, at Juan-les-Pins or Antibes or the ultrafashionable Palm Beach. The Côte was having a good season. The casinos were crowded with women who glittered as Mrs. Stevens glittered and gambled heavily, so intent on the fall of the cards or the spin of the ball that they paid no attention to the player sitting next to them. The appraisals he made at roulette and baccarat tables were the easiest part of his work. The drudgery came later.

Bellini helped him with names and addresses, occasionally even with floor plans or blueprints of particular villas. But John spent long hours of the night in the shadows outside one or the other of the villas, studying the house and grounds, noting at what hour the occupants came in, the order in which lights went off, and when the servants first began to stir in the morning. He listened for dogs to bark, other sounds.

Later he drew from memory careful sketches showing the height of a wall, and how a tree shadowed a corner of the house, and whether window shutters were regularly closed or left open as a matter of household routine.

He was working against time, always, and Mrs. Stevens handicapped him. Whenever his work took him near a roulette wheel where she was playing, she would welcome him with cries of "Lucky! Lucky Burns! Come over here! I need you! This wheel is *ruining* me!" He finally had to go to Bellini for help.

"I'm having trouble with Mrs. Stevens. She won't leave me

alone, and she attracts too much attention. I need a girl to go around with me in the evenings to keep her off."

"I see." Bellini considered the matter, then took one of his business cards out of a drawer and wrote with a scratchy pen. When he had finished, he blew the ink dry.

"La Plage Nautique, a beach which advertises small sections of sand open to the public, is near your hotel. Ask for Danielle. She works there. Tell her what you want with her, and how much you will pay. She has had experience with American gentlemen before."

He found the signboard of La Plage Nautique not far from the Hotel Midi's *plage privée*. It was one of half a dozen similar signboards along the promenade. Each *plage* had its own chairs and umbrellas for rent, its own paddle boards for hire, its own small row of dressing rooms for the use of its customers, its own *professeur de natation*. He saw from the sign that the *professeur's* name at La Plage Nautique was Claude. There was no mention of Danielle, and he was wondering how to find her when a girl in a bikini came up to the steps where he stood. She smiled at him.

"I am Danielle, m'sieu. Do you want to see me or Claude?"

He gave her the card. She read what was on it and said politely, "How do you do, Mr. Burns."

Danielle was nineteen or twenty, as pretty as a flower. She had the straight nose and heart-shaped face common to many French girls, widest at the level of the eyes and tapering to a delicate mouth and chin. Her hair was a short mop of blond curls, and her figure was still the figure of a young girl, slim and small-breasted. Her skin was golden brown from the sun. She could have been Mr. Burns's daughter, the youngest of three or four.

John thought, Damn Bellini. I can't use this child.

He told her what he wanted, feeling more ridiculous each minute. He explained that he was alone in Cannes, liked to visit the casinos in the evening but felt out of place without a companion, did not speak French—Mr. Bellini had recommended her highly—he would pay well for her time—she could be sure it would remain a business arrangement—nothing personal. . . .

He was conscious that she was studying him while he talked, measuring the balding, middle-aged man with the flat feet, wondering how he would behave after the second drink and what he meant by a "business arrangement." He knew what was going

on behind her gravely polite expression. But when he finished at last, half hoping she would think of an excuse to refuse him, she said without hesitation, "I'll be happy to go with you in the evenings, Mr. Burns. Shall I come to your hotel tonight?"

"I'll be glad to call for you. . . ."

"It will be better for me to come to your hotel, I think. Where are you staying?"

He told her. They set the hour and arranged a price. It was very businesslike after the uncomfortable preliminaries. He felt less like a fool.

While they were still talking, Claude, the *professeur de natation*, came up and said, "*Qu'est-ce que c'est?*" to Danielle, smiling professionally at John.

Claude was a little man with a sleek cap of black hair, hardly taller than Danielle but broad-shouldered, slim-hipped and muscled like a weight lifter. He wore only bathing trunks, and ropes of muscle crawled under his tanned skin when he moved. John, looking at Claude's shoulders, thought idly, A good climber, if he isn't muscle-bound, and immediately, automatically, Thief?

The thought stirred him. But he knew it was senseless to suspect anyone simply because of overdeveloped arm and shoulder muscles, and the suspicion left him after he had listened to the conversation between Claude and Danielle, which Mr. Burns, not speaking French, was not supposed to understand.

Claude was not clever enough to be a successful thief. He was small-minded, and as pompous as a man of his size could be. When Danielle had explained what Mr. Burns wanted of her, Claude said, "I do not like the looks of the *type*. He will massage your legs under the table. How do you expect me to feel about that? A man has his pride."

"Oh, spread your pride on a piece of bread and eat it!" Danielle was trying to keep the anger from her voice. "You don't own me."

"I'll spread him on a piece of bread and eat him if he massages your legs." He turned the professional smile in John's direction. "*Au revoir, m'sieu. Enchanté de vous connaître.*"

He walked away, swelling his chest. The muscles rippled in his back.

"Doesn't he approve?" John asked.

"Oh, yes. I'll see you this evening, Mr. Burns. Please excuse me now."



DANIELLE met him in the lobby of the Midi that night, and regularly afterward. Usually they had dinner together before going on to the casinos. Her wardrobe was not extensive, and, because he thought she would feel out of place among the expensively gowned women in the Midi's huge dining salon, he took her to smaller, less public restaurants. At the gambling tables he always bought her a handful of hundred-franc counters when he bought his own. She liked to play, but she insisted on turning everything back to him whenever she won. Actually she cost him very little. She was pretty, chic, well-mannered, and demanded no more attention from him than he wanted to give her. As he had hoped, Mrs. Stevens let him alone when she saw that he had a companion, and Francie never paid any great attention to him, beyond a casual greeting when they passed in the hotel or on the beach.

Danielle had the same keep-your-distance air about her that he had first noticed in Francie, but something about her reminded him of someone he had known before. In an attempt to pin the resemblance down, he asked questions.

She had learned English in the French schools and improved it in England, where she had spent nearly a year as lady's maid. The job ended when the lady walked in on Danielle and the lady's husband as Danielle was slapping the husband's face. She was hoping to find another permanent position that did not have complicating factors. In the meantime, Bellini placed her temporarily with summer visitors to the Côte as lady's maid, governess, or—she put it frankly—as social companion for American gentlemen. Between times, she worked for Claude at La Plage Nautique, collecting rentals for the beach chairs and umbrellas, or simply standing around ornamentally in a bikini so gentlemen could admire her figure and possibly decide to patronize the *plage*.

"Doesn't Claude ever get jealous, or resent having people stare at you?" John asked.

"All he cares about is the money it brings in. Besides, he has nothing to be jealous about. I only work for him."

"He swelled his muscles at me the first day I talked to you."

She laughed. "Those muscles. You needn't be afraid, though. They're all he has. Nothing upstairs. It's too bad."

"Why is it too bad?"

She said seriously, "He wants me to marry him. I'd like to get married, raise half a dozen children, darn their socks and cook

soup for them. I like babies and cooking soup. But Claude . . ." She shook her head doubtfully.

They were dining at Les Ambassadeurs, on a low mezzanine overlooking the main-floor dining room. While John was waiting for the waiter to bring his change, he looked down at the floor below and saw his old hunting companion, Paul du Pré.

The white dinner jacket caught his eye first. Paul was alone, and sat facing him directly. The subdued light was too dim for John to see his face clearly, but there was something, a kind of rigidity in the way he sat, which warned John that Paul's attention had been attracted. He turned his head, not too quickly, and then, as the waiter came back with his change, stood up to draw Danielle's chair away from the table.

She said something to him. He did not hear the words, but he smiled and followed her away from the table, letting his shoulders sag and his stomach push forward, trying to shrink into his clothes. He did not dare turn around to see if Paul had moved. He did not look back until they were outside in the street. Paul had not followed. He knew he could not return to the casinos again. He said to Danielle, "I don't think I'll go to the casino tonight. Not tomorrow night either." He disliked what he was doing, but she had given him an opportunity he needed.

Danielle said, "What's the matter, Mr. Burns? Did I offend you, talking about Claude, about getting married?"

"You didn't offend me, Danielle." He did not try to meet her eyes. "I'm just suddenly tired of gambling, I guess. I've really enjoyed your company."

She turned away. He said lamely, "Wait a minute, I owe you some money. And I don't want you to think . . ."

"Give the money to Mr. Bellini for me, please. Good night."

It was an unpleasant way to end a pleasant relationship, but he had to get rid of her one way or another, and with a reasonable excuse. He could not take the chance of meeting Paul face to face somewhere under the bright lights of the gambling tables. He would have to go ahead with what he had, and trust that he had enough to bait at least one effective trap.

HE HAD three prospects for the thief. Le Chat would have robbed, or attempted to rob, all of them.

Mrs. Stevens was the first and most obvious. His second choice

was an American couple, the Sanfords. They were as well known on the Côte for their huge parties as they were for Mrs. Sanford's emeralds. She frequently drank too much champagne to be cautious about her jewelry, and the house guests she invited to her famous galas at the Château Combe d'Or were generally people who brought jewelry of their own to put on display. Mimi Sanford always announced the most elaborate gala of the year at the end of the summer season, when her social rivals had exhausted themselves. John had hopes for the gala, if everything else failed.

His other choice was the wife of a rich Brazilian coffee planter named Souza.

It was not long before John realized that another man was equally interested in the dazzling jewels that were being worn at Cannes that season. He noticed a thin, elderly man with white hair and a white guardsman's mustache who spent his afternoons on a bench in the little park across the boulevard from Van Cleef & Arpels' window, usually with a copy of the *Continental Daily Mail* for company. He did not remember to turn the pages of his newspaper as often as he should, and his clothes were more appropriate for London weather than for the Côte.

John had no opportunity to put Bellini onto him until the day after he saw Paul at Les Ambassadeurs. When he went to Bellini to report, he found the *Continental Daily Mail* reader twisting his mustache points in Bellini's office.

He said, "I didn't mean to interrupt. I'll come back later, Bellini."

Bellini said, "Mr. Paige was just leaving. Have you gentlemen met? Mr. Paige, Mr. Burns."

Mr. Paige said, "How do you do?" jerking his head quickly at John. "Just about to go. You'll do what you can for us, Bellini?"

Bellini giggled helplessly after the man had left the room. "He wants to get in touch with Le Chat," he said.

"Who is he?"

"A special agent from a London insurance company. They've been badly hurt by claims, and he wants to make an offer for the jewelry before it is broken up. I represent the company myself, in a small way. He hoped I would have heard if the jewels had been offered on the market."

"What did you tell him?"

"The truth. That I had not heard of a single stone being of-

ferred. This is a very clever and cautious thief, John. The police are increasing pressure on *le milieu* every day, trying to pop him to the surface like a seed from a grape. It is time to get started, John. You will want help. How many?"

"Half a dozen good men."

"What is good?"

"Strong, active, and handy with a blackjack. Some of our old bunch, if you can get them. Like Coco and Le Borgne."

Bellini giggled. "There is a small house for rent on the rue Georges Clemenceau." Bellini took a key from his desk. "Go there at seven o'clock tonight. You may find some old friends waiting for you."

After he left Bellini, John had lunch and went down to the beach. For the first time, he went to La Plage Nautique rather than to the *plage privée* of the Midi for his regular afternoon appearance in the sun. He wanted to see Danielle, if only to say hello. He still felt vaguely guilty about dismissing her.

She was not at the beach. He remembered that Bellini had spoken of other work for her. Claude strutted up with his professional welcoming smile, his fine muscles rippling. He and John talked mostly in pantomime. John said "*chaise*" and "umbrella" with gestures, and "Danielle?" raising his eyebrows. Claude gave him the chair and the umbrella, but no news of Danielle. He didn't know, or didn't want to say. He set up John's chair, cocked the umbrella over it and went away.

John closed his eyes. He made up his mind not to think at all until it was time for him to talk to Coco and Le Borgne. Seven o'clock would come soon enough. He was half asleep when he became aware that someone stood in front of his chair and was looking at him. He came fully awake at once, still with his eyes closed. His first thought was, Paul? then, Oriol? He breathed twice, keeping his muscles slack, and opened his eyes.

It was Francie Stevens. Her brief bathing suit was wet from the sea. Drops of water sparkled on her arms and shoulders. "Good afternoon, Mr. Burns," she said, smiling.

He had never seen her smile like that. He had wondered more than once what an expression of animation would do for her. Now he knew. She was alive, vital, sparkling. He did not wholly like the change. There was something in her expression that made him uneasy. He said, "Hello. Where did you spring from?"

"The diving raft. I saw you come down to the beach. I wanted to ask you a question." She laughed breathlessly. "I'm kind of excited, I guess. You needn't be, though, because I haven't talked about it to anyone else yet. You're Le Chat, aren't you?"

CHAPTER 3

GOD muscular control had always been his most valuable asset. He kept his face blank and his muscles loose. He felt a strong urge to swallow and fought it down. He said, "I'm what?"

"You don't want me to shout it out loud, do you?" She nodded to indicate the sun bathers lying on the beach near them. "Somebody might understand English."

He put his hands behind his head, stretching. It gave him a chance to swallow, ease his tight throat. "If I'm the man you say I am, you'd better call the police. I might be dangerous."

"I don't think you're so dangerous. And I'm not going to call the police. For a while, anyway. I want you to hear how clever I was, first. Come on, we'll walk down the beach. We can't talk here."

He was still marking time when he got up from the chair, going through Mr. Burns's movements. He had no ideas, only a realization of pressing danger.

They walked on the hard wet sand at the edge of the sea. She swung her bathing cap by its strap.

"My, it's a lovely day," she said breathing deeply. She went on conversationally, "I would never have suspected you except that I always have to look out for Mother. People have tried to steal her jewelry before. When I read about the—you—in the papers, I was sure that Mother would catch your eye. At first I was looking for somebody tall and athletic and muscular, the young man on the flying trapeze, or one of those over there, for example." She pointed at a pair of beach tumblers doing flip-overs on the sand. "But then I realized that nobody who was really a human fly and an acrobat would leave so many signs around to *prove* he was a human fly and an acrobat. The answer had to be that you were just someone ordinary, like Mr. Burns. And there was Mr. Burns, right under my nose."

"Very logical. I wish you would tell me how I managed all

those thefts, if I'm really not a superman. According to the papers—"

"I don't think you're really as stodgy as you try to look, but that's beside the point. You aren't a superman, you're a gang."

"I am?"

"Certainly. You're just the front man. And the brains, of course."

"Thank you. Have you identified my helpers?"

"Only one so far. The cute French girl." Francie turned her head to ask him in a friendly way, "Am I impressing you with my cleverness?"

"Not yet."

"I'll come to it. You were pretty good, everything considered, and it's hard to put a finger on what I mean, but you're not quite convincing, John. You don't talk quite the way an American businessman ought to talk, or act like one. Particularly an insurance man. I was engaged to an insurance man once. For a week." She laughed. "All he ever talked about was insurance. And baseball. You never even mention your business, or baseball, or television, or Hopalong Cassidy, or politics, or wage freezes, or high prices, or anything that you ought to talk about. You're just not American enough to carry it off."

He said tolerantly, "Francie, you're a nice girl but you have too much imagination. You're going to cause me unnecessary trouble if you go around telling people about the famous jewel thief you've discovered. I'm on a vacation. I want to relax, not explain my way out of a French jail. If I can prove to you that I left New York six weeks ago, will you forget this nonsense?"

"No."

He knew from her triumphant tone that she was about to play her top card. "I cabled my ex-boy friend in New York and had him check up on all the Burnses in the insurance business. They're all present and accounted for. You don't exist. So how could you have been in New York six weeks ago?"

It was so hot in the open sun that most of the sun bathers had gone under cover of the umbrellas or were in the water. He was sweating under the harness next to his skin, but he felt cold inside. He could only mark time; take a step, leave a footprint, stop when she did, go where she led. He was on a leash.

She said, "Are you going to rob Mother first or Lady Kerry?"

"Lady Kerry, in the circumstances. Who is she?"

"Don't be backward. I'm not going to give you away, John. I told you I liked excitement, and you're it, for the time being. Lady Kerry is the high-nosed English character your cute girl friend went to work for this afternoon."

"I don't suppose I could convince you that I never saw Danielle in my life until a few days ago, or that I didn't know she had gone to work for Lady Kerry until you told me."

"Certainly not. I'm only surprised that you hope to get away with such an obvious plant. The Kerry jewels are famous."

He laughed, and the laugh was not wholly an effort to keep Mr. Burns alive as long as possible. The Kerry jewels were as famous as she said, but every thief in Europe knew they were only clever copies of the once valuable originals, which had long since gone to bolster the sagging Kerry fortunes. It was too bad he could not explain the joke.

Francie said, "If I were you, I'd leave Lady Kerry alone and rob Mother. Even the French police are going to be smart enough to arrest your girl friend after Lady Kerry's jewelry disappears, and you wouldn't want that to happen. Is Danielle your mistress?"

"No."

"It wouldn't be gentlemanly of you to say yes, would it? I'm sure you're a gentleman. It's one of the things I like about you. Gentleman thief has such a nice sound." She patted his arm. "Aside from that, you can make a good thing out of Mother's jewels. They're insured for \$72,000, not counting the diamond-and-emerald dog you helped her win at roulette. It would be a fine thing for everybody concerned if you would steal them. You'd make a nice profit, she'd have the fun of spending the insurance money all over again, and the French national economy would be benefited to the extent of \$72,000."

"How would you suggest that I go about it?"

She frowned. "It's a problem, of course. She's never had a personal maid, so it would be impossible to plant anyone on her, and she leaves the jewel case in the hotel safe all the time except when she's asleep in the same room with it. She's careful about bolting her door, too. Are you light on your feet?"

"When I don't stumble over young women with silly ideas."

"I could arrange to leave my door unlocked some night. You could get in that way. Or why couldn't I steal them myself and

smuggle them to you? You could send one of your men to get into her room sometime when she's not there and leave marks at the window to show that The Cat had come down from the roof by rope ladder. Of course, you couldn't have the diamond-and-emerald dog, because it isn't insured, but the rest of it is plenty. Another scoop for Le Chat, more publicity in the newspapers, and the police absolutely baffled. As the French say, *voilà!* What could be prettier?"

"Don't talk so loud. Pretending for the moment that I'm really an honest insurance man, I wouldn't want anybody to hear us planning to beat a London insurance company out of \$72,000." His confidence was returning, slowly. Even if Mr. Burns were to survive only on a leash, it was still survival. He said, "Besides, they wouldn't pay the claim."

"They'd have to."

"Not if the diamond-and-emerald dog were left behind."

"It has nothing to do with them. It's not insured."

"That's why they'd fight the claim. They're not stupid. A professional thief wouldn't pass up the only piece of jewelry not covered by the policy, simply by accident. Your mother would have a lot of explaining to do, in that case. I'm sorry to be so discouraging just when you are launching your career as a thief, but the only way you could collect the insurance without answering awkward questions is to make a clean sweep."

"I'm not going to let you have the dog. I'll just have to think more about it, that's all." She put on her bathing cap. "I'd like you to join Mother and me for a drink this evening," she said. "We haven't seen you at Le Petit Bar lately, and I may have some new ideas by then. Eight o'clock."

"I'll be glad to, some other time. I don't think I can make it tonight."

"You'd better, if you know what's good for you. Eight o'clock sharp, John."

She smiled sweetly, turned her back, took a few running steps, and made a clean dive into the shallows. She came up on her back five yards farther out, lifted her hand to wave, then swam away, slim brown arms and white cap bobbing in the blue water.

JOHN TRIED to sleep during the heat of the afternoon. He put the DO NOT DISTURB sign on his door, drew the window blinds,

stripped, took a cool shower, made all the preparations to rest, and lay awake, sleepless. Bellini had chuckled automatically when he told him about Francie but had obviously been startled. He agreed that John had no choice but to humor her for the present. Bellini also had some news to impart. Paige had come to see him. "He has been talking to Lepic," Bellini said. "He wants to put *récompense-proportionnelle* advertisements in the newspapers—a reward for anyone who returns the jewelry, and no questions asked. You know the police do not like them because they increase the market value of stolen goods. He knows it, too, and was surprised when he asked Lepic for authority and Lepic told him to go ahead, without growling about it. He gained the impression that Lepic did not think newspaper advertisements would make a difference one way or the other, as far as recovery of the jewelry is concerned, which is generally true enough. But Lepic sounds much too amiable. He has something up his sleeve. Expect something unusual from him."

John could not sleep. He got up, pulled the mattress from the bed to the floor and used it as a tumbling mat for half an hour. He was streaming with-sweat before he finished, but he felt better for the exercise. After he had bathed, he reconstructed Mr. Burns with particular care; the harness, the padded shoes, a touch of dye at the hair roots, a razor for the balding temples, an American necktie.

He could not get over the feeling that Francie held him on a leash. Mr. Burns would be on hand for cocktails at eight o'clock, if he knew what was good for him. Mr. Burns would provide excitement to order. Mr. Burns would steal her mother's jewels when she told him to, but would be careful not to take the diamond-and-emerald dog. It was on a leash, too, and it was worth \$5000. Mr. Burns was good only for twenty years at La Maison Centrale.

The daylight was fading when he reached the house on the rue Georges Clemenceau. It was seven o'clock exactly. He saw no one in the street, a sign that Bellini had sent him good men. He used his key, turned on several lights, found a radio and tuned in a Paris musical program. Someone pulled the cord of the old-fashioned doorbell almost immediately.

The six men came in singly, a few minutes apart. Le Borgne was heavier and grayer than he had been in the maquis, and had

a respectable glass eye instead of a patch over the empty eye socket. Coco had not changed at all. He was a small man with a wide, lipless mouth, tight and mistrusting. John did not know the other men. He passed cigarettes, saying, "Have one from an old friend."

John saw recognition come to Le Borgne first, then to Coco. Coco said "No" doubtfully, and then "Yes!" He took John by both arms. "Le Chat! John the Neck-breaker! But what a stomach you've put on, man. Give me your hand so I can make sure, and not too much with the fingers. I am no Boche sentry, remember."

They shook hands. One of the men he did not know said "Le Chat!" in a different tone, and he heard it repeated. It was a bad name in *le milieu*. Even Coco took his hand back quickly. His eyes grew hard again, after his first enthusiasm.

John said, "The Cat you knew, Coco. Not the one the police are hunting."

"There is only one Cat," Coco said. "I read the papers."

"There are two."

Le Borgne broke the silence that followed. He said, "Talk some more, John."

He talked for half an hour. He used Bellini's name more often than was necessary, for the value it had with these men, while he explained what he had done and what he hoped to accomplish. He passed around his sketches of the two houses they were to watch for the thief, and pointed out probable points of entry into them. He showed on the sketches where shrubbery would give cover for them to watch the points of entry, and where they could make a safe rendezvous. He explained the household routines, the habits of the householders, where they slept and at what hours. He said, "I don't expect anything to happen at the Combe d'Or before the gala next week-end, but you'll have to be ready just the same."

He divided them into two groups: Coco with two men to watch the Brazilian couple, Le Borgne and the others for the Combe d'Or.

A young man with an evil gypsy face threw his cigarette on the floor. He said, "All right. We know what you want from us. What do we get out of it?"

"You get the thief. The Sûreté will take the pressure off when they have him. You can go on about your business again."

"It's not enough. The *flics* have not interfered with my

business. If I am going to sit out on my tail all night every night under a bush, someone will have to pay for it."

Another man said, "That goes for me."

John had not considered the possibility that others would have a lesser personal interest than his own in the capture. While he hesitated, Le Borgne said, "He's right, John. You and I and Coco have our necks to save. It's different with the rest of them."

"What did Bellini promise you?"

The spokesman for the bargainers said, "Something if we catch him, nothing if we fail. It's fair enough. But we want to know what the something will be."

"He has stolen jewelry worth a hundred million francs, and none of it has been shopped off yet. Bellini won't hand him over to the Sûreté without squeezing him first."

"How can Bellini hold it back?" the spokesman asked, practically. "Naturally the thief will talk."

"Let him talk. A large London insurance company has insured most or all of it. Their man is offering *récompense proportionnelle* for the recovery, no questions asked, and Bellini should be able to get twenty percent out of him. Twenty percent of a hundred million to divide around will pay for several nights of sitting under a bush."

He let them work out the arithmetic for themselves. They seemed satisfied.

"Don't worry about us," Coco said. "Next time you hear from us, we'll have this imitation Cat in a basket. Eh, there, citizen of the Republic?"

He dug the gypsy in the ribs. The gypsy said something that was obscene even for a gypsy. And then he said, "Wait a minute. What about you?" He was talking to John. "What will you be doing while we squat all night under a bush, eh?"

"I have a trap of my own to watch. I think he will come to me first, if he comes."

"Do we share alike, regardless?"

"You share in everything. Bellini gave you his word. I give you mine."

After they had gone, John closed the house and walked back down the rue Georges Clemenceau to the yacht harbor and La Croisette. The illuminated face of the clock in the old stone tower on the hill overlooking the harbor said five minutes to eight.

He entered Le Petit Bar at eight sharp, obedient to the leash.

Francie was there with her mother and a man who sat with his back to the door. When the man turned his head to speak to Mrs. Stevens, John saw the tip of the fierce guardsman's mustache. Mr. Paige's path was crossing his with increasing regularity.

Mrs. Stevens glittered even more brightly than usual. The diamond-and-emerald dog was pinned to the shoulder of her dress, she had diamonds in her ears, diamonds on her fingers and diamonds on her wrists. Her lipstick was, as always, lopsided, and she drank champagne from a glass with red smears on the rim. She was dressed for a good time and seemed to be having one.

Francie greeted John. She said to her mother, "Mr. Burns is taking me to Monte Carlo."

"Good." Her mother tossed off the last of her champagne. "We'll all go to Monte Carlo."

"You can't come. You've had your share. If he's as lucky as you say he is, I want him for myself."

"Since when have you taken up gambling?" Mrs. Stevens winked at John. "You've done something to my daughter, Lucky. I don't know what it is, but she's almost human lately. Look at her—gambling and everything. She's even wearing my beads. I don't know what's come over her."

The necklace was hard to ignore. Francie wore a black, strapless evening gown, very plain in the way that only Dior or Schiaparelli could make plain black dresses. She had done her hair so as to expose her ears, with sapphire earrings at the ear lobes. The blue of the stones at her throat and ears, matching and emphasizing the blue of her eyes, produced an effect that could not have been accidental. It was as if she had chosen deliberately to display the necklace and earrings, not as ornament but as they might be displayed on a model, for themselves.

Mrs. Stevens said cheerfully, "Well, if I can't go with you, I'll have to go somewhere else. I'm going to stay up until breakfast. I've got a new roulette system. Do you gamble, Mr. Paige?"

Mr. Paige did not take the hint. He said absently that he did not enjoy gambling. He was clearly preoccupied with Mrs. Stevens's display of jewelry.

Francie said firmly, "Good night, Mother. Good night, Mr. Paige," and took John's arm.

He stopped her when they were in the foyer of the hotel. "What's going on?" he said.

"I want to gamble."

"You never gambled before. And you don't have to go as far as Monte Carlo to start."

"I told you. I want to go to Monte Carlo. You're taking me."

"No."

"Yes, you are." She had stopped smiling. "Otherwise we'll go back to Mother and Mr. Paige and talk about Le Chat. You know who Mr. Paige is, don't you?"

"Francie, you're crazy! Even for a joke . . ."

"I'm not joking, Mr. Burns. Are you taking me to Monte Carlo, or back to Le Petit Bar?"

He said, "I'll have to change my clothes."

"I'll wait for you here. Don't be too long."

He did not know what Francie was planning, whether Monte Carlo was only a whim or something else. He could only go where she led him. At least, the accident of her mother's decision to stay out all night to try a new roulette system saved him from having to leave his best bait for the thief waiting and unguarded.

He had been watching the bait for four nights. Mrs. Stevens ordinarily came in at one or two in the morning, Francie about the same time. According to his timing, they were both sound asleep by three. It left an hour or an hour and a half before the light of early summer dawn for a thief to get at the red leather jewel case that remained in Mrs. Stevens's room only while she slept. Every night he spent the vital hour and a half waiting patiently in the dark by the small window of his bathroom. If the thief came at all, John knew how he would come.

His room was on the third floor back, while the Stevenses' suite was fourth floor front, but the windows of both bathrooms opened into a tiny light well that offered a safe, hidden passage up through the interior of the building. There was a hatch at the basement level and a skylight in the roof. During John's first night in his new room, he waited until very late, then stripped to a pair of shorts and went up the light well as a mountain climber goes up a cleft in the rock, back and feet braced against the blank walls. One exploration was enough to satisfy him that the thief could enter the shaft either from the skylight above or the hatch below. He was sure of his own ability to bottle the thief once he heard sounds of movement in the shaft. All of his preparations had gone toward that moment.

Now, for one night at least, the watch was unnecessary. He could forget Mrs. Stevens temporarily. The invisible leash kept him from forgetting Francie. She was waiting where he had left her. The magnificent necklace sparkled at her throat like an invitation.

He hired a car at the taxi stand across from the hotel, and they drove to Monte Carlo by way of the Middle Corniche. The road, high up on a cliff after they had left Nice, followed the curves of the coast, in and out and around above the sparkling lights of Beaulieu-sur-Mer and Villefranche and Cap d'Ail below. The stars were bright, the night air pleasantly warm, the view magnificent.

He said, "Tell me why you wore the necklace tonight. Do you expect me to steal it?"

"Not right away. I thought you might like to examine it first. It's worth \$11,000. Shall I take it off?"

"I'll take your word for it. I meant why did you wear it tonight, when you never wear even a ring ordinarily?"

"I don't like jewelry, ordinarily."

"Why?"

She shrugged. "Just one of those things. Some people don't like parsnips."

"That's not a reason."

She did not speak again for some time. The car hummed along quietly, roared for a minute as they passed through a tunnel bored into the rocky cliff, then hummed again in the open. Starlight dappled the sea below the cliff.

"Mother owns seventeen oil wells," Francie said abruptly. "I'll inherit them."

"So with that necklace around your throat, you feel as though you're \$11,000 worth of diamonds and sapphires to any man who smiles at you, and not just a pretty girl at all. Is that it?"

She nodded. "I've got so I don't trust anyone, not even an in-offensive, friendly man like Mr. Burns of New York. It's an unpleasant state of mind, when the slightest friendly gesture from a stranger only makes you suspicious."

"It must make it difficult for you to listen to any man who might really be more interested in the color of your eyes."

"It does. Especially if he compares them with sapphires." She laughed humorlessly. "It happened two weeks ago. I left him and

rode home alone on the bus. I'm sure the poor man wasn't really interested in the oil wells at all. I felt horrible about it afterward. And, of course, it's nothing you can explain."

"Why did you put on the necklace tonight?"

"Because I don't have to worry about ulterior motives in your case. You're an honest thief. We both know what you're after. I can enjoy your company without nasty, suspicious thoughts in my mind. I don't like feeling nasty and suspicious."

HE HAD not been in Monte Carlo since 1939. Twelve years and a war had passed it by without changing anything. The quiet, sharp-eyed men in the foyer stood in the same positions opposite the door, watching the people who entered the gambling salons. Inside, everything was as he remembered it: the flowered wallpaper, the faded gilt, the ornate crystal chandeliers, all the atmosphere of decayed Victorian splendor. The expressionless croupiers looked the same, and he thought he even recognized the dead, burned-out faces of some of the ancient system players at the roulette wheels, hunched over their charts marking down endless chains of figures—*rouge* and *noir*, *pair* and *impair*, *manque* and *passee*. Nothing that he remembered had changed by as much as a single prism on the chandeliers. The American dice tables were new, but they were set unobtrusively back in an alcove. Even American dice tables could not affect Monte Carlo. It was timeless.

"What do we do first?"

"Buy counters, I suppose. If you really want to gamble."

"I want to gamble."

They bought counters at the nearest wheel. Francie put fifty thousand francs on the red and drew a quick, impersonal glance from the lookout on his high chair at the end of the table. Black won. While Francie was reaching to place another bet, John looked around the salon. His only immediate worry was that Paul might be there, but he did not see Paul. He had only to mark time, obey the leash. It was ten o'clock.

THEY LEFT the casino at four in the morning. Francie had won six hundred thousand francs at roulette, lost nearly as much at baccarat, experimented without much result either way at the dice tables, and was still genuinely puzzled how anyone could get a thrill out of gambling.



"You win, you lose, and it makes no difference one way or the other. That couple I introduced you to tonight, the Americans, were both betting two and three and four hundred thousand francs at a time, all over the table. The money didn't mean a thing to them." Minutes later she added, "Did you notice her emeralds, or don't you want to discuss business?"

She was talking about Mr. and Mrs. Sanford of the Château Combe d'Or. Le Borgne and his men would waste the night at their watch. The Sanfords were wound up for an evening.

He said, "Even an honest man would notice stones like those. Who are they, anyway?"

"I don't really know anything about them except that they're very rich and she gives big parties. Mother and I went to one last year, an enormous thing; all the famous people in France were there. You could have stolen a million dollars' worth of jewels from the guests alone. If she gives another party this year, would you like to go? I can get you invited."

"You're not very loyal to your friends."

"Because I suggest that you rob them? That's silly. Jewels don't mean any more to them than the money they gamble with. They're all part of the show. What's the difference—the real difference, in terms of good or bad—if they lose ten or twenty million francs at roulette or to a thief?"

"Some people could make a moral distinction."

They discussed moral distinctions all during the drive back to Cannes, and John realized, with great surprise, that he had forgotten the leash he wore and the danger Francie represented to him. He was genuinely enjoying her company.

It was the beginning of a beautiful day when the car drew up in front of the Hotel Midi, and it had been, for John, a much more enjoyable night than he had reason to expect. He tried to tell Francie something of the way he felt when he left her at her door.

She said, "I had a good time myself. I'm not such awfully bad company, am I?"

She touched the necklace lightly, almost affectionately, with her finger tips. "This is the first time I've ever been able to wear these beads, as Mother calls them, without hating it. I'm glad you're a thief, John."

"I'm glad you enjoyed yourself."

"Good night."

He went to his own room, feeling tired and relaxed, and contented. It must be because she's an American, he thought, taking off his clothes. I'd forgotten what Americans are like.

He lay down on top of the bed, still with the odd feeling of contentment in his mind.

He was nearly asleep when he heard the thin, frightened screaming begin on the floor above. It was Mrs. Stevens's voice, recognizable in spite of the high, hysterical note. Over and over and over again, endlessly, she screamed, "My jewels! My jewels! My jewels!"

CHAPTER 4

HE DRESSED quickly, then checked deliberately in the mirror: hair, eyebrows, shoes, body profile. He thought, I've blundered. I've got to do it right, now. Another blunder will finish me.

He left his room, checking Mr. Burns's actions in his mind as he had checked Mr. Burns's appearance. It would be unnatural for him not to respond at once to screams from the Stevenses' suite, since he had left Francie at her door only a few minutes earlier. He would not wait for the elevator. He went up the stairs, not too quickly. Mr. Burns was level-headed.

A number of hotel guests had already gathered in the hallway, most of them half dressed. John said, "What is it?" to a man in a brightly colored bathrobe.

The man said, "Damned if I know. The cat burglar has been around again, I guess. Somebody was yelling about her jewels."

Two uniformed *agents de police* pushed their way through the crowd and a moment later Mr. Paige arrived. Francie opened the door for Mr. Paige and, seeing John there, hesitated for a moment, then beckoned to him with a quick, demanding gesture. He followed the insurance agent into the room.

One of the policemen had his notebook out and was attempting to question Mrs. Stevens, who still lay on the bed with her hands over her eyes. She made small, tragic, moaning noises. The *agent* with the notebook said patiently, "If you please, madame . . ."

The second *agent* had been looking at Francie for some time. He had a Frenchman's unconcealed admiration for a pretty girl, and he liked Francie's appearance in the strapless black gown. He

said, "Perhaps mademoiselle could tell us what has happened."

She said to the hotel *directeur*, "Tell him that Mr. Burns—this gentleman—and I went to Monte Carlo for the evening. We returned fifteen or twenty minutes ago. He left me at my door, the next room, through there. I had been wearing one of Mother's necklaces, a valuable piece of jewelry, and I wanted to put it back in the jewel case. She woke when I came in and I asked her for the key to her jewel case. She said it was in her purse. I took it out, and when I went to open the case"—she pointed to it, standing open on a commode—"I saw that the strap of the lock had been cut through. I told Mother that she had been robbed."

The *directeur* translated. The *agent* wrote in his notebook.

"I called Mr. Paige, who represents the insurance company, since I thought he would want to hear about the theft immediately," Francie added.

"Very good," the *agent* said. "Value of the stolen jewels?"

The *directeur* asked Francie. She said, "Sixty-one thousand dollars, not counting the necklace I was wearing or"—her pause was hardly noticeable—"or a pair of sapphire earrings."

The *directeur* made a mental calculation and said, "Twenty million francs, more or less."

The *agent* whistled soundlessly, made a final note and closed his book. "*Voilà*," he said amiably. "Another nice haul for Le Chat. You may expect Commissaire Divisionnaire Lepic within the hour. Touch nothing in the meantime. *Bonjour, messieurs et dames*."

The two *agents* saluted together and left the room. The *directeur* and Mr. Paige followed them. Mrs. Stevens, her hands still over her eyes, lay quietly on the bed. Francie motioned to John in the same abrupt way she had called him in from the hall. They went through the connecting bathroom into her room. She shut the door and put her back to it.

"Very neatly done, Mr. Burns," she said coolly. "You really didn't need any help after all, did you?"

"I had nothing to do with it, Francie."

"Of course not. Your alibi is unbreakable. I'll support it myself—after you return the diamond dog."

"I haven't got it."

"I'll give you until this evening to find it. That should be long enough for you to get in touch with your confederates."

"Francie—"

She interrupted him. "You're in no position to bargain. Don't make me any more resentful than I am, Mr. Burns."

"If you'll stop to think for a minute, you'll realize I couldn't have planned it. We both heard your mother say she was going to be out all night. I don't know why she changed her mind. . . ."

"She lost all her money. The system didn't work."

"All right. She lost her money and came home before she intended, so the jewels were available to a thief. I didn't know that. I couldn't possibly have arranged it."

"I don't know what you arranged, or who you sent to steal the jewels. But I want the dog. I can call Mr. Paige, if it's necessary. Make up your mind."

"What if I say no?"

Her eyes flashed. "Don't be a fool! I'm giving you a chance. If you don't want to take it . . ."

She put her hand on the doorknob. "Well?"

"You'll get the dog."

She opened the door.

In his room again, he changed to shorts and a shirt with half sleeves, then shaved. His hand was steady and sure with the razor. He had nearly eleven hours in which to think of an alternative.

He heard Mr. Paige calling down the light well from the skylight in the roof. Another voice he took to be Lepic's answered from below. He heard "Le Chat" and "*corde*" and "*agilité*."

He heard "Le Chat" again when he passed a reporter questioning the harassed *directeur*. Outside, the doorman was discussing the theft with two men, one of whom had a camera which he was aiming up at the big HOTEL MIDI sign. The other man was Paul.

John did not break his stride. Paul was watching the cameraman. John went down the steps, averted his face and was safely by and nearly to the promenade when Paul called, "Mr. Burns!"

John looked back. Paul was coming toward him. He said politely, "Mr. Jack Burns?" He gave no sign of recognition.

"Yes."

"My name is Paul du Pré. A friend asked me to call on you."

He was a well-mannered stranger introducing himself. John said, "How do you do, Mr. du Pré?" and was conscious of his own calm. One more danger on top of the others hardly seemed to matter.

They fell into step. The promenade was almost deserted. It

was still too early in the morning for strollers. There were benches at intervals, just at the edge of the walk above the beach. Paul said, "Let's sit down and talk for a minute."

They sat down. Paul said, "Is that a false stomach you're wearing?"

"False stomach, padded shoes, hair dye, false eyebrows, forged passport. What do you want with me, Paul?"

"Not a great deal. Who was the girl with you at Les Ambassadeurs?"

The question was so unexpected, so completely apart from everything in his mind, that it had no meaning at first. He had to think back: Les Ambassadeurs.

He said, "Her name is Danielle."

"I want to meet her."

John felt a slow boil of anger rising in him. He said, "Did you hunt me out behind my false stomach and dyed hair so I could introduce you to a girl?"

"No. No." Paul made a quick, apologetic gesture. "I'm sorry. I shouldn't have asked it that way. But I've been thinking about her so much, seeing her face. . . . I can't get her out of my mind. Didn't you notice how much she looked like Lisa?"

His anger went away. Even in his own trouble, he knew how deep Paul's hurt was. He said, "A little. I hadn't realized it."

Paul straightened. "I must meet her, John."

A man and a girl in bathing suits went by on their way to the beach, laughing at some joke. When they had passed, John said, "Is that all you want with me?"

"I'm not really as thoughtless as that. I didn't come here just to bring you my own troubles. What can I do to help you?"

"Nothing, except tell me how you recognized me."

"I saw your profile at Les Ambassadeurs, before I saw the rest of you. When you stood up I thought I was wrong. I didn't see how you could make yourself look so different, so clumsy, but I was interested in the girl as well, and I asked questions until I learned your name and where you were staying. I wasn't certain until I spoke to you back there and heard your voice. It's a good disguise. No one could picture you climbing over roofs."

"How long have you known that I climb over roofs?"

"Since Germaine told me about the police raid and how you got away. I read the article in the *Herald Tribune*. I'd seen you

many times without your clothes, so it wasn't hard for me to guess a connection between John Robie, who climbed mountains so well, and Le Chat. Oriol wouldn't talk. I don't know what there was between you two, and I'm not going to ask questions you don't want to answer, but he's bitter about your escape. It's more than just his feeling as *commissaire*. Something personal. He won't say a word, and he's hushed the whole thing over, but I can sense it in him. You made a bad enemy in Oriol."

"I seem to have made a lot of enemies."

"You needn't make any more. What can I do to help you, John? I assume that you went back to your old trade because you needed money. I have . . ."

He stopped. John stood up.

"You can do only one thing for me, Paul," he said. "Leave me alone. Forget you know me. Don't come near me again. Good-by."

He walked away before he had to look again at Paul's face. It was not easy deliberately to kill a friendship that had been as good as his and Paul's.

BELLINI's source of information at the Hotel Midi was a switchboard operator, from whom he got the quickest kind of service. He listened to the operator's report, then put the telephone back in its cradle and wiped moisture from his face and hands. All four men in the room, Le Borgne, Coco and John as well as Bellini, were sweating.

"Lepic just left the hotel looking pleased with himself," he said. "He was there less than thirty minutes. He must have found something."

"There's never anything to find," John said.

"Maybe the girl has already talked," Le Borgne said.

"I don't think so. She promised me until six o'clock."

Bellini said, "Are you sure she will really talk then?"

"Unless I produce the dog."

Le Borgne and Coco had been there when John arrived, reporting to Bellini as they had been told to do. Nothing exceptional had happened during the night. John alone had failed to cover his end. He had an excuse, but it was still a failure.

Le Borgne said, "It was only bad luck. We haven't finished with him yet. You had better run while you can, John. Leave the rest of it to us."

"It's been too late to run since she found out who I was. I can't get away."

Bellini said cheerfully, "The air of pessimism is not natural to you, John. Have you thought of telling her the truth?"

"It's the only idea I've had. I'm trying to think of a better one."

"It should be enough. She was on your side before. If you can convince her that you don't have the dog, and that her best chance of recovering it is to coöperate, she should keep quiet."

"I think she might."

"What is the objection then?"

"I just don't like it. The more she knows, the more hold she has. She'll have you all on the same leash she has me, if I tell her the truth."

Coco said, "I say hit her on the head, but the next best thing is clearly to talk. If she sells us, we're all sold sooner or later anyway, unless we catch this pig of a burglar."

Bellini nodded. "I agree."

"Just as long as you know," John said. "I'll try it if I can't think of anything else. Whatever happens, keep the traps covered somehow. They may save all our necks."

"On that subject, I don't like the gypsy," Coco said. "I almost conked him last night. He smokes on the job, for one thing. He denies it, but I smelled the tobacco. For another thing, he moves around like a cow with two calves. He will have to be taken off."

John said, "Better take him off today, Bellini."

"What about a replacement?"

"I'll replace him myself, if I'm still loose tonight. If not, get somebody else tomorrow." John felt suddenly hopeful again, less discouraged by his own failure. A vague idea that had been in the back of his mind was beginning to take shape. He said, "How much do you know about Claude?"

"In what respect?"

"The possibility that he may be our thief."

Bellini chuckled. He said chidingly, "John!"

"I know. He's not clever enough to manage it on his own. But he has the physical equipment for it, and Francie gave me an idea when she told me how she reasoned that the thief had to be one of a gang. Suppose she's right. Suppose the imitation of Le Chat is deliberate, to put the *flics* on watch for Le Chat and no

one else. But instead of working alone, as I did, this thief has a clever confederate. Danielle, the brains. She works during the season for people like Lady Kerry. She can't steal anything herself and hope to get away with it, but she can set up the thefts for Claude, tell him if the stones are worth while, where they are and when they will be available."

"Possible. Always possible," Bellini said. "But it is only a bare theory. Why pick on poor Claude? Why not any of a dozen equally agile and muscular *professeurs de natation*? Or, for that matter, any of hundreds of young men with Claude's biceps?"

"Because Claude has Danielle. The others don't."

Bellini nodded wisely. "You are impressed with Danielle."

"She has a good head, she doesn't like being poor, and in some ways she reminds me of myself at her age. She has a state of mind. I may be misjudging her, but I'm still curious. Have any of the people she worked for been robbed?"

Bellini shook his head. "I am careful about these things. If Danielle, or any of my people, had even been questioned in connection with the thefts, I would have investigated."

John shrugged, then rubbed his eyes. It was more than twenty-four hours since he had slept last. His mind was dull with fatigue. He was sure there were other important things that Bellini should be reminded to do, but he could not think of them, or of anything else except the coming need to beg his freedom from Francie. It was nearly noon. He had six hours before the deadline.

He said, "I've got to sleep. Can I do it here? I don't want to go back to the hotel while there's still a chance I might run into photographers."

"Of course. Close the door. I'll see that you are not disturbed."

"Don't let me oversleep. I've still got a hope, and I don't want to lose it by failing to get to the beach before six."

"I've never failed you yet, John. And you have much more than a hope with the girl. When she knows the truth about you, that you are not a thief at all, there will be even less reason for her to betray you than there was before."

John went into Bellini's bedroom and sat in a chair against the wall deliberately trying to relax. It did no good. He could not stop his mind from its activity, nor control his thoughts. He saw only Paul, sitting alone on the bench with the hurt of rejection in his face. He thought of Oriol, whose friendship had turned to

bitterness at what he believed to be a betrayal, and of Francie, coldly angry at the deception she thought he had played on her.

All three had been his friends. All three would still be his friends, if they knew the truth, and yet his whole instinct was against telling any of them. The feeling was as strong as his faith in Bellini. When he tried to analyze the reason for it, it came to him suddenly that he put his faith in Bellini and Coco and Le Borgne not because they were fellow *maquisards* but because they were outside the law. Francie and Paul and Oriol were not.

It's because you're a thief at heart, he thought, with real surprise. It was the plain truth. He had stolen nothing in twelve years, had no intention ever to steal again, and yet retained a thief's distrust of those who were not thieves themselves. He got up, kicking the chair away, and went into Bellini's office.

"You say tell the girl the truth. The truth about me is that I am a thief, Bellini. I just found it out. The truth about Francie is that she's on the other side, for all her talk; she'll probably send me back to La Maison Centrale, sooner or later, one way or another. Maybe even without trying. If I believed in premonitions, I'd say I had one."

He went back into the bedroom and closed the door.

Bellini looked thoughtfully at the door. For once, he was not smiling. He believed strongly in premonitions.

CHAPTER 5

Bellini woke John about five. He held a copy of the day's edition of *L'Espoir*.

"Lepic is badly out on a limb, or else he has found something that we do not know about," he said, plainly worried. "I don't like it. He is too cautious to make promises he cannot keep. Read it." He gave the paper to John, then went back to his office to answer the ringing telephone.

L'Espoir's front page showed a photograph of the thief's latest victim with her lipstick more lopsided than usual, and another of the skylight, with an arrow indicating the thief's point of entry into the light well. The photographs were less important to the story than Lepic's statement, directly quoted, that the Sûreté Nationale promised an arrest in the immediate future.

Bellini came back. "They have started the roundup they promised. Jean-Pierre, in Marseilles, was first."

"They took him?"

"Not yet. He was tipped and got away. But they are looking for him, and if they do not find him they must find somebody. Le Borgne may be next, or Coco. I will have to get word to them quickly."

John put the newspaper down and stood up to put on his coat. He felt calm, rested. He said, "It may not be necessary. If I'm going back to prison, there's no reason why anyone else should go with me. I'll let you know how I come out as soon as I can."

Bellini said, "I am certain that you will be able to win her help." He went to the window and drew the shade up and down. It was Bellini's way of calling a messenger. "Don't be pessimistic, John. It is not like you. Something has happened to you."

He chuckled encouragingly. John said, "Nothing has happened to me, yet."

IN THE STREET John saw a red-fezzed Moroccan on his way to answer the signal of Bellini's window blind. He passed one of the patrolling *agents* on the promenade and thought, It won't take long to happen if it does happen.

His common sense told him he could convince Francie that she had no cause to betray him. But he could not escape the premonition that, whether she meant to or not, she would somehow be the cause of his downfall.

She was sitting under an umbrella on the *plage privée*, reading a book. The second chair under the umbrella was unoccupied.

He said, "May I sit down?"

"It isn't necessary." She indicated an open beach bag on the sand at her side. "You can drop it there."

"I haven't got it."

She leaned forward, deliberately, to look at the clock face in the old tower on the hilltop. He said, "It's five thirty. In a week or two I might be able to get it for you. I can't do it in half an hour. If you'll let me explain, I'll tell you why."

"I don't want an explanation. I want the dog, Mr. Burns."

It was a flat, cold demand. There was no lightness in her now, none of the friendly mockery with which she had tugged him by his invisible leash before. He knew she would carry out her

threat if he did not win her over at once. He sat down beside her and said, "You gave me until six. I still have thirty minutes."

He began to talk, quickly, before she could deny him.

Because he had never told anyone the story before and did not have it formulated in his mind, he began with his escape from the Villa des Bijoux. But it was not the beginning. Neither was the maquis, nor the prison, nor his trial, nor even his first theft. The whole story was his biography. He found that he had to go back farther and farther, finally as far as his memory took him.

He had been five years old when his father put him on the rings. There were only two of the Flying Robies to begin with, his father and mother, smalltime acrobats in the smalltime carnivals which played one- and two-day stands in the New England states. He became the third member of the troupe when he was big enough for his father to lie about his age. Before he was twelve, he was a competent trapeze flyer. Later he learned to do a walk on the high wire, double as a tumbling clown, substitute for the man who turned somersaults off the trampoline.

"I was always best at something that called for climbing," he said. He had not looked at Francie since he began to talk, but he knew he was holding her. So far. "I was strong. I had a good head for heights, and confidence in myself. Acrobats need absolute faith in their own ability more than anything else. My father lost this when he missed a catch and let my mother go over the end of the net into a bank of empty chairs. He never went on a trapeze again, and he died soon after."

John was left with a few suits of tights, the muscular development necessary to climb a rope hand over hand in a way that made it look simple, and a knowledge of the rest of his trade. When he was twenty-one, he got an offer from a French troupe touring Europe. The troupe was a coöperative venture that had already ceased to coöperate before he arrived to join it. In Nice, where he heard the news, a hotel thief stole what remained of his money, his passport, and all his other means of identification.

"I didn't resent it, particularly," he said. He still had not looked in Francie's direction. He kept his eyes on the diving raft that floated offshore, bobbing brightly in the sunlight. "In the carnivals, a mark was always a mark, a sucker, a john, somebody to be cheated. Pickpockets and short-change men were as much a natural part of the business as the clowns. I thought of myself as

another mark in a strange territory. It never occurred to me that I could go to the American consul and borrow passage money home. My mind didn't work that way. There were other marks around, plenty of them. I had only to find the right one."

That was the summer of 1936. Shortly afterward, an acrobatic thief climbed a drainpipe up the side of a small villa on Cap Ferrat, got in through an open bedroom window, and made off with the jewels of a British lady while she and her husband slept off the effects of a late evening.

He made one hundred and twenty thousand francs for the night's work, then worth about \$4000, not as much as he would have got later when he had learned the language and how to value stones properly, but enough to allow him to keep up a front until his next theft. The moral aspects of thievery never concerned him. The marks were there and climbing drainpipes was an easier and more profitable way of using his skill to make a living than any other he had known. Le Chat came into being.

That winter he studied French with a group of American students in Paris, read what there was available to him about the valuation of precious stones, and followed the society columns as well as lapidary trade journals, which noted the manufacture or sale of outstanding gems. When he returned to the Côte the following season, he already knew whom he meant to rob, if the proper opportunities presented themselves. He was cautious, confided in no one, worked alone and planned each theft carefully. Le Chat flourished.

He went on to tell her about the events that had led up to his purchasing the Villa des Bijoux and his retirement to the life of a country gentleman. At this point he hesitated. But Paul and Oriol were part of the story, even Lisa, and he could not find a way to avoid the continuation. He made it as brief as he could, up until the publication of the article about Le Chat in the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune*. From that point he told her everything, step by step, from his escape at the villa down to that afternoon. When he had finished, he looked at his watch. It was six fifteen. The sunlight had begun to fade.

"I can prove enough of it to satisfy you, I think," he said. "It's in your own interest to keep quiet and let me go on with what I'm trying to do. If we catch him, I'll see that your mother's jewelry is the first returned." He looked at her then and knew

he would not need to give any proof. He said in explanation, "I've been talking my way out of twenty years in prison, Francie. I wasn't sure about you. I didn't know how you would take it."

"Why didn't you tell me before? You didn't want to trust me?"

"I'm not trustful by nature."

"But you trust Bellini."

"He's different. So are the others. I had to learn to trust them to survive. Just as I'm trusting you now."

He did not want to talk further about it, or explain why there was an essential difference between his confidence in Bellini and his feeling toward her. He turned to look up at the promenade.

A Moroccan rug peddler was there, holding out his gimcrack wares to the passers-by, wheedling them to buy. But he did not follow anyone far, and he kept his eye on the beach. John raised his hand, palm out, then closed his fist. The peddler walked away.

Francie said, "What was that for?"

"I was sending word to my friends that I'm still available."

AGAIN THAT night the traps were set and nothing happened. At dawn, Coco and Le Borgne retired to the cave where they had set up housekeeping to keep out of the way of the *flics*, and John returned to the hotel.

He did not see Francie all day. He slept in the morning, made a visit to Bellini afterward. The day's edition of *Nice-Matin* asked baldly: WHAT ARREST AND HOW SOON, M. LEPIC? The plain-clothes *agents* patrolled La Croisette as usual. Everything was the same as it had been for days, except the weather.

The sun still shone hotly in a clear sky, but a mistral had begun to blow from the southwest, and the force of the wind across the open sea piled waves up on the beach. The Hotel Midi's tiny patch of sand was covered with water nearly to the promenade, and the other beaches farther along, although more sheltered, were not much better. The sun bathers had no place to go except the promenade, which was overcrowded with chairs, mats and cushions. John was making his way through the crowd when he saw Paul. He stood at the edge of the promenade above La Plage Nautique watching Danielle and Claude on the sand below, hurrying to move umbrellas and beach chairs back from the encroaching waves. John walked over to Paul's side. "She does look like Lisa. I hadn't realized it before," he said.

"Am I to recognize you?" Paul did not turn his head.

"We've been introduced."

"I'm glad to see you still looking well, Mr. Burns. In spite of what you said the last time we talked."

"I was expecting trouble, Paul. I didn't want you involved. It's the only reason I said what I did. Someday I'll explain."

Paul shook his head, puzzled. "Someday it will be too late to explain. I don't understand you. You're taking a terrible risk. For what? It can't be just money."

All the time they talked, Paul had been watching Danielle. The waves were coming in fast. Claude's fine muscles bulged as he caught a heavy paddle board which was about to float off and pulled it to safety. Danielle, wading knee-deep for the paddle, was as quick and graceful as a sea nymph.

John said, "Do you want me to introduce you?"

"Will you?" Paul accepted the offer hungrily.

They went down the steps to the sand. He had an excuse in the money he still owed Danielle and had forgotten to leave with Bellini. The introduction of Paul as a friend was natural and casual. Danielle was businesslike, polite. Claude was too busy to pay attention to any of it. When Paul helped Danielle catch a chair that was about to drift away, John took the opportunity to walk off and leave them together. The rest was out of his hands.

THE MISTRAL had stopped blowing when John made rendezvous at midnight on the hillside above the cottage in Le Cannet occupied by the Souzas. The Brazilians came in at one o'clock, early for them. The lights went off before two. At dawn the milk cart came clattering over the hill. Nothing else had happened.

Before they separated, Coco told him that Le Borgne was complaining of rheumatism after sleeping on the ground of their cave. Le Borgne had nothing else to report except that preparations were going forward at the Combe d'Or for the Sanfords' gala. Lights were being strung over the *terrasse* and through the château gardens. "One-Eye says if they keep stringing lights there won't be any way for a thief to approach the house except by burrowing," Coco said.

"He'll burrow then," John said. "There'll be two or three hundred million francs there for the taking. I wouldn't pass it up."

Coco did not enjoy life in the cave any more than Le Borgne.

It soured him on everything. "I think this dung heap of a thief has retired for good."

John said, "It's only two days since the last theft. Patience."

"I spit in the face of patience! You can talk. You sleep in a warm bed when you sleep. I sleep on a layer of pebbles."

"They'll give you a warm bed at the nearest jail, if you want one," John said.

He was back at the Midi by sunrise. In the afternoon, when he made his regular appearance on the beach, he found Francie and her mother in their usual places. Mrs. Stevens was asleep in the shade of the umbrella. Francie was reading. She closed her book when she saw John and came to meet him.

"Let's go for a stroll. I've got something to tell you."

They walked to the far end of the beach and beyond, to where there was nothing but rocks. The *agents* never came that far. Francie said, "Mother and I spent all day yesterday cultivating the Sanfords. We've been invited to the gala. So have you."

"Why me?"

"I thought you might want to be there, if you expect something to happen. You don't have to go if you don't want to."

He had not counted on the possibility that she would take positive action on her own, and he did not want to find himself at cross-purposes with her. His arrangements were too final, too carefully planned. He said, "I don't need your help, Francie. All I asked is that you keep quiet and give me a chance to work things out my own way. If I slip somewhere and get caught, it won't do you any good to be mixed up with me and a gang of ex-convicts. There's no sense in taking unnecessary risks."

"Maybe I want to." She was defiant. They did not speak again until they were back at the beach. Francie picked up her book.

"The gala begins next Friday night, and the house guests will stay through Sunday," she told him. She was again the girl he had known before she guessed his identity: withdrawn, disinterested. "We'd better go together, since I had to explain to Mrs. Sanford that we were particularly close friends in order to get you the invitation. I'll try not to bother you unnecessarily until then."

There was nothing he could say.

THE MISTRAL began to blow again that night. After greeting Coco and Le Borgne, John took a position at the mouth of a cul-



vert from which he could watch the Brazilians' villa. He took off his clothes and the body harness and exchanged his shoes for the light glove-leather gymnast's slippers he had brought in his pocket. Besides the slippers, he wore only shorts. There was a charged, electric feeling in the air.

The Brazilian and his wife came in at two. The lights came on in the house, burned for a time and went out. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked. There was no other sound but the rush of the wind through the scrub and the tinny creak of a street light on its pole, no movement but the dancing shadows.

Souza's first shout, more than an hour later, was a wordless yell, meaningless. John thought the Brazilian must be having a nightmare. A light came on in one of the bedrooms. Almost immediately a woman screamed, and the man gave a different kind of shout, this time of pain. Another male voice inside the

house called urgently, words that John could not distinguish. The woman screamed again.

The rest followed quickly. A man's figure appeared suddenly on the roof of a portico, outlined by the glow of the light in the road. He hesitated there, looking back, then climbed a railing and jumped, disappearing from sight as he dropped into the garden below. Seconds later another man stood on the roof of the portico, and a pistol roared, steadied and roared again. But then John heard the scrape of running feet on the gravel and knew the fugitive had safely reached the road. The gun roared again and the man dropped, not far from the hanging light on its pole. There was a ditch along the roadside and a screen of grass that concealed John. The man with the gun came quickly to roll the body in the road so he could see its face. Because he had never seen Commissaire Divisionnaire Lepic before, John did not recognize him. But the dead man was the surly, dark-faced gypsy.

When it was safe for John to move, he went up the hillside to the rendezvous, to tell Coco and Le Borgne that their patience had been for nothing. Another trap had failed.

CHAPTER 6

"I KNOW he wasn't the man we were expecting," he told Bellini, hours later. "It's out of the question."

"I don't see how you can be so certain," Bellini said. "It seems to me that you are challenging your own judgment. I agree that mine is also open to challenge, since it was my own man who betrayed us." He chuckled. "Honor among thieves is not what it used to be. Still, the gypsy was a burglar, as we know."

"A burglar," John agreed. "But not *the* burglar. He couldn't have robbed Mrs. Stevens, any more than he could have climbed the marquee chain in Monte Carlo. Both of those thefts were done by a professional."

"He was not entirely an amateur, John."

"I mean that he didn't have the physical ability to pull himself two stories up a hanging rope. It takes training, and more than average strength. He wasn't our man. There isn't a possibility I could be wrong."

"Lepic doesn't seem to agree with you."

Bellini indicated the newspaper he had been reading.

John said, "I'm not convinced of that. What he believes and what he says for publication needn't be the same thing. I think he must know as well as I do that his scheme missed fire. But he promised an arrest and the gypsy can't deny anything. And it makes Lepic look good."

The black scarehead said: *LE VOLEUR EST MORT!* The thief is dead! The article quoted Lepic as saying that the failure of the *Sûreté Nationale's* most expert men to find and identify John Robie, the man once known as *Le Chat*, had led him to doubt that the thief they hunted was in fact *Le Chat*. At the same time that he had continued his search for John Robie, he had arranged an inviting trap for the actual thief with the coöperation of M. and Mme. Souza. Having trapped the thief, Lepic had shot, meaning only to wound him. The bullet, regrettably, had struck a vital spot. The unfortunate criminal had paid for his misdeeds with his life, *hélas!*

Hélas! was conventional in any French newspaper report of violent death. It was the reporter's contribution. Lepic had not expressed his own feelings, neither regret nor triumph. He was a faithful public servant reporting the successful performance of a disagreeable duty so that his detractors could judge for themselves what kind of a man they had been criticizing.

"Do you think he really shot only to wound?" Bellini said.

"I don't know. He was aiming carefully, but it's hard to tell what he was aiming at."

"If he believes his own story," Bellini went on, "he must have wanted the gypsy alive, to talk. The whole thing will collapse unless he traces the stolen jewelry. Still, even if he knows the truth, he has a breathing spell. He escapes further criticism, and he leaves the real thief—meaning you—believing that all is in order for another operation. One thing I do not understand is how the gypsy hoped to succeed with the robbery, John. He knew you were watching the house."

"I gave him what amounted to a blueprint showing how to do it. I told him just what to expect from the thief, when we would wait for him and where we would watch. He got in before we were there. I suppose he meant to leave the house after we had gone, before anyone awoke. It might have worked, except for Lepic. Do you have anyone who can get close to the *commissaire*?"

"Possibly. What do you want to know?"

"Whether or not he really believes that story he gave the papers. If he doesn't, he'll certainly cover the Sanfords' gala, and that means you'll have to take Le Borgne and his men off before they stumble over a *flic* in the dark."

"Who will watch the Combe d'Or, in the event that Lepic does not?"

"I will. As a guest. Francie Stevens got me an invitation, which I declined and which I'm now going to accept after I've knocked my head on the ground and begged her pardon for hurting her feelings by refusing her help."

Bellini tittered. "Pride, John?"

"I don't know. I'm having trouble understanding what it is I feel these days. All I'm sure of is that I wish I could finish it off, one way or another."

MR. PAIGE also wanted to finish off, one way or another. He had a check from the London insurance company for \$61,000 in his pocket, payable to Mrs. Stevens, when he read the newspaper story with his lunchtime cup of tea. After he had finished his tea, he went to the local commissariat and asked for an interview with Lepic.

Mr. Paige came right to the point. "Shooting the thief wasn't wise, if I may say so. It complicates the matter of tracing the stolen jewelry."

"No one regrets his death more than I do," Lepic said stonily. "It was an unfortunate accident."

"Quite. You're positive he was the man?"

"I have no reason to change the story I gave to the newspapers."

Mr. Paige knew when he was wasting his time. "You know your business." He spoke as mildly as before. "I won't try to interfere. But my principals are not going to be satisfied for a minute until the jewelry comes to light, and my principals have influence in Paris. Disposing of the thief may be enough for your superiors. It won't be for the insurance company. The jewels, Commissioner, the jewels. The total is now one hundred and twenty-two million francs, if you have forgotten."

When he had gone, Lepic locked the door, sat down loosely, and looked blankly at the floor.

His ambition had put him into his own trap. Ambition and the

desire for the glory that would come from a singlehanded capture of Le Chat had led him into the first mistake. The rest had followed because of his confidence in his own cleverness.

He had set a trap for a thief, the trap had clicked shut, a thief had been caught. Killing had been an accident, as he said; he wanted a confession and the jewelry, not the thief's life. But a dead thief was still the sign of success, and when he stood in the road looking down at the gypsy's body, already savoring the public triumph he had earned, and saw that the man he had killed was not John Robie, it was harder for him to discard the fact of success than it was to discard his belief that John Robie was the man he wanted. The first lie had been to deny that he had expected to catch John Robie. He had tried to qualify his story to the newspaper reporters, but he could not bring himself to confess failure. Now it was too late. Already the ministry had telephoned from Paris to congratulate him on his success and implied that it would express its appreciation even more tangibly when he had effected a return of the stolen jewelry to its proper owners. That was important. Most important.

He could have denied the truth of the story then. He had not been able wholly to abandon the hope that he might still have his reward. But Oriol, driven at last out of his shell by the report of the death, had come to see the body for himself and flatly told Lepic that he knew the dead man was not the thief, assuming the blame for his own mistakes so that Lepic would not give up the hunt. And when Oriol promised to make a disclosure, at any expense to himself, if it were not carried on, Lepic's shaky hopes of rewards and triumph crashed.

He did not waste his energy damning Oriol for not coming forward sooner. He needed Oriol's help. "I tell you frankly that your mistakes will cost you your position, *commissaire*," he had said, "as my mistakes will cost me mine, unless between us we find Robie quickly. If we do not take him before he can steal again, we will both be publicly disgraced. We still have a chance. Go home, keep your mouth shut, and stay in touch with me."

"What are you going to do?"

"Be on hand when he attempts another theft."

MR. PAIGE was far from satisfied when he left Lepic. When Mrs. Stevens trapped him in the lobby of the Midi to ask when

she could expect her money, he told her that the *commissaire divisionnaire* had said she might expect her jewels back very soon instead. He was vague about how soon was very soon.

Mrs. Stevens sniffed. "Well, all I can say is that it was all very badly managed." She told Francie about it during the afternoon and decided that an immediate investment of her own money at Cartier's and Van Cleef & Arpels was the only sure way to insure herself against appearing barefooted and in rags at the gala. It kept her running from shop to shop for the rest of the day. John found Francie alone on the beach. She wore the zebra-striped bathing suit and lay sunning on the sand with a straw beach hat over her face to shield her eyes from the glare. When he spoke to her, she removed the hat long enough to say hello, then put it back so that it hid her face again. It was not a gesture of rudeness; her greeting was pleasant enough, and the hot sun made an eyeshade excusable.

He said, "I shouldn't have been so brusque with you the other day, Francie. I apologize for it. I would have apologized even if I didn't intend to ask for the help you offered me and I refused."

The hat kept him from seeing her expression. She took so long to answer that he thought she was ignoring him. She said at last, "I was trying to bring myself to apologize to you."

"To me? Why?"

"For not minding my own business. I should have realized that you would have to manage your own affairs in your own way. I did, later. That's why I haven't pestered you since."

"You never pestered me, Francie. I tried to explain. I don't want you to get into trouble, if something goes wrong. I wouldn't ask you now if there was any way to avoid it."

"Isn't it all over?"

"No. Lepic didn't get the right thief. I think his story is a smoke screen, that he's inviting another theft. Whether he is or not, I still expect something to happen at the gala, and I want to be there." A moment later, he added, "You won't involve yourself. All you have to know about me is that I'm a fellow American at the hotel."

"So that in an emergency I can always claim that you deceived me as you deceived everyone else, and go my own merry way unsullied? Is that what you mean?"

"Yes."

He thought she sighed. He couldn't be certain. He couldn't tell what she was thinking by watching a straw hat, and he doubted that even if she took the hat away her face would tell him anything. His apology hadn't changed things. She was still the girl he had known first, the one who could sit at a table with him and others, smile when somebody spoke to her, and not be there at all. He had the feeling that she was neither for him nor against him now, only withdrawn.

She avoided him until Friday afternoon, when they were to leave for the Sanford party. On Friday morning the newspapers appeared with a list of guests who were to attend the annual *fin-de-saison* gala week-end at the Château Combe d'Or.

Among those expected was a one-time American cinema star, now the Princess Lila, whose late wedding to her royal Oriental bridegroom had made international headlines partly because she had been married in a bridal gown decorated with six thousand precious stones, wearing with it her husband's gift of a string of pearls, said to have been originally presented to the Queen of Sheba by King Solomon. There were others nearly as important to Mimi Sanford's social triumph: the heir to a doubtful European throne, a Turkish cabinet minister, minor celebrities of various nationalities and, at the bottom of the list, Mme. Maude Stevens, Mlle. Francie Stevens, M. Jack Burns and M. le Comte du Pré de la Tour.

The unexpected news that Paul would be at the gala was a blow. John and Francie had met in the lobby and were waiting with the luggage while Mrs. Stevens made a last-minute flying trip to Cartier's to buy a diamond sunburst she could not possibly do without after hearing about Princess Lila's pearls, which were insured for one hundred thousand pounds sterling. John said, "I didn't know Paul even knew the Sanfords. I'll be handcuffed with him there. He'll keep his eye on me every minute."

"He's your friend. Don't you trust him?"

"I have to trust him. He could give me away any time. But trusting him and trying to explain to him are two different things."

"Why? You explained to me when you had to."

He said, "Paul is honest in a way you aren't, and if I am hurting your feelings again it's because you asked me to. You're not a thief, but you would have helped me steal your mother's jewels. Maybe a touch of crookedness will help you understand why I

feel a debt to Bellini and Coco and Le Borgne. It's the only thing that kept me here from the beginning. I could have got away, but they were my friends, the only friends I ever had before I knew Paul. That they're crooks doesn't make any difference. I owe them my help. Paul could never understand that. I don't know how to describe him except to say that he's so honest himself he can't even picture thieves and honest men in the same frame. You have to be one or the other, in his eyes; an honest man on the side of honest men, or a thief among thieves. He can understand me as one or the other. But for what I am, a crook who doesn't behave like a crook and still won't cross over . . ."

Francie said, "He should be able to understand loyalty."

He made a helpless gesture. He could not explain further. "I don't know. If I can't do anything else, I'll have to try to explain, but I don't want to."

"Any more than you wanted to explain to me."

"No."

"You're even a bigger fool than I thought you were." It was neither an insult nor a joke, only a statement of fact.

He left her before she could see his irritation. He called Paul's number and was told that M. le Comte would not return before Monday. Because he knew of only one other place where he might hear news of Paul, he walked down the promenade to La Plage Nautique.

Claude and Danielle were quarreling about something. Claude said, "*Ah, flûte*," insultingly and walked away as John came down the steps. He did not bother to turn on his professional smile for Mr. Burns's benefit.

Danielle was flushed and angry. John said, "Have you seen Paul?"

"He was here this morning. I don't think he'll ever come back. That pig Claude! I could kill him! He insulted Paul. He called him an awful name."

"Why? What did Paul do?"

"Nothing, really. But he's been here every day since you brought him, and even Claude couldn't help seeing how he feels about me. This morning Paul asked me to a week-end party at a friend's house, a gala some Americans are giving. . . ."

"I know about it. I'm going myself."

"You know how respectable it will be then. But Claude—oh,

he said horrible things to Paul, swore at him, wanted to fight him." She shook her head violently, so that tears flew from her eyelashes. "Paul is so clean and gentle himself. He doesn't understand how anyone can behave like an animal."

"He's made quite an impression on you."

"Of course he has. He's the finest man I ever met."

She wiped her eyes on her wrist. John said, "Are you going to the gala with him?"

"I can't. I'd only embarrass him."

"If you mean because someone might ask questions, wonder who you are . . ."

"It isn't that." She wiped her eyes again. "I'm sure he wants an opportunity to ask me to marry him. I don't know how to answer him. I like him a lot, Mr. Burns, but I don't love him."

"I thought you had a practical attitude about those things, Danielle."

"Not with Paul. He's too decent. And he was too much in love with Lisa. He told me about her. I can't substitute for her. I can't give him back what he's lost. I'd only make him miserable in the end. And myself." She sighed unhappily. "I wish you had never brought him here."

"I'm sorry, Danielle. I didn't know it was going to turn out so badly."

It was too late for him to do anything about Paul, either for Danielle's sake or for his own. Nothing remained for him but to go to the gala, and hope that he would be able to meet the problems as they arose.

THE Château Combe d'Or was one of the show places of the Côte. It stood alone on top of a hill above Cannes, commanding a view of the entire sweep of sea between the Estérel hills on the west and the Maritime Alps on the east. On a clear day, George Sanford could see from his front window the blue of Corsica visible to the southeast. He was proud of his restoration of the fifteenth-century château. An ancient growth of ivy climbing one side of the tower made the castle appear, from a distance, as medieval as it might have been originally. But part of the old moat that once surrounded it had been turned into an emerald-tiled swimming pool, the rest planted with shrubs and flowers, and the former barren square of the courtyard was now a clipped

green lawn between the pool and a wide, flagged *terrasse*, where guests could dine or dance on a summer evening or drink their host's good brandy and smoke his fine cigars.

Mimi Sanford came dripping from the swimming pool to welcome Mrs. Stevens, Francie and John, and invite them to change for a swim before the sun went down. But she was a good hostess. She did not make it necessary for Mr. Burns to explain why he could not accept an invitation to the swimming pool.

He had already studied the floor plans of the *château*. Bellini had obtained copies of the architect's blueprints for the reconstruction. Bachelor guest quarters were in the west wing, one of two which extended from the main body of the building like arms embracing the *terrasse*. As he had expected, he was given a room in the west wing. Francie and her mother and the Princess Lila were lodged in the central building, the old castle keep.

John thought it was safe for Mr. Burns to have learned enough French to ask the man who carried his bag to his room if *le Comte du Pré de la Tour* had arrived at the *château*. The man went to inquire, and very soon a knock sounded at the door.

It was Paul. "The valet told me you wanted to see me."

"I asked him if you were here. I didn't expect him to send you."

"My room is just across the hall. What do you want?"

"I saw your name on the list of guests. I thought I'd better talk to you."

"If you knew I was going to be here, you shouldn't have come."

"I had to come."

"You'll have to leave, then. I'll drive down to Cannes and telephone you so you can say you've been called away unexpectedly. It will take me about half an hour. You can make up your own story for Mrs. Sanford."

"I'm not going to leave, Paul. You have to trust me. . . ."

Paul's calm broke. He said furiously, "Do you think I could stand by and let you rob my friends? Even a thief ought to have a sense of decency. Make an excuse and go, or I'll give you away. I swear it."

"You'll send me back to twenty years in prison if you do."

"I'm giving you a choice. For God's sake, John!" It was like a groan. "You don't give me any at all."

He tried to shove by. John said, "Wait!" and put out his foot to block the door. Without hesitation, Paul hit him.

The blow, which landed solidly on John's unprotected chin, knocked him across the room. He did not lose consciousness until he brought up against the wall, but then the strength drained suddenly out of his legs. He felt himself falling.

When his eyes focused again, he did not know how long he had been sitting on the floor. He got up, closed the door and locked it, then went to the window.

He saw Paul come out, get into his car and roar away. Another car coming up the hill, a dusty Citroën with a buggy-whip radio aerial mounted on one rear fender, had to risk the extreme edge of the road to avoid a collision. The Citroën continued up the hill and pulled into the parking space Paul had just left. A man got out. Although the sunlight was nearly gone, John recognized Oriol's stocky figure immediately. He thought the second man who got out of the Citroën was Lepic, but he could not be certain. He watched the two men come toward the *château*, saw George Sanford leave a group of his guests on the *terrasse* and go to meet them. A servant went to the car and came back carrying a pair of suitcases. The whole group moved together toward the west wing.

He had his door open a crack when they came by his room.

"... don't like it," George Sanford was grumbling. "I appreciate your position, Commissioner, but I'm still not happy about it. Now that you've disposed of this cat burglar, I don't see why we can't relax and forget about jewel thieves. I have to tell you that Mrs. Sanford has been against the whole thing from the start."

Another voice said smoothly, "The elimination of one criminal does not mean there are no others, Mr. Sanford. The very fact that we have finished with one thief will invite others to expect us to be lax. That is why I have asked for secrecy. I assure you..."

The voices faded. John closed the door and turned the key. His main feeling was one of relief that all his problems were now one, simple and elementary. Mr. Burns and Mr. Burns's troubles were finished.

He took off the body harness and the padded shoes and packed them away in his bag with the blueprints. The eyebrows would have to be soaked off with hot water. He did not have time for that, and they were not important. He put on a gray slipover and gray flannels, the glove-leather slippers, and buttoned his passport and his money in his hip pocket. Mr. Burns's passport was

worse than useless to him now, but he kept it. It was a tie to something he had hoped to have.

The room was growing dark. All but a few minutes of Paul's promised half hour had passed when someone came along the hall and rapped lightly on the door panel. He thought it was the call to take Paul's telephone message, but Francie's voice said, "John."

He let her in. In the semidarkness she saw the profile of his body.

"John, what have you done to yourself?"

"Tossed Mr. Burns overboard. He can't make another appearance."

He told her about Paul, and of Lepic's arrival with Oriol. He said, "I have a few minutes before Paul telephones. He'll give me away if I don't leave, Oriol will identify me if I stay, and Lepic is bound to be curious about anyone who disappears without an explanation. He'll investigate when Mr. Burns can't be found to answer an urgent telephone call, so be ready for questions. Let your mother do most of the talking. She won't have to put on an act."

"What are you going to do?"

He put his hand on her arm to silence her. Footsteps were coming down the hall again. There was a knock, another, a call, "*Téléphone, m'sieu*," another, louder knock. He answered and in a moment the footsteps went away.

"That's it," he said. "It will be a few minutes before they begin hunting for me. Better not let them find you near my room."

"What are you going to do?"

He said, "Tell me the schedule for the week-end. Just the hours after dark."

Whatever else he might think about Francie, he was grateful for her quick intelligence. She said, "Tonight, only music and dancing on the terrace. Everyone is too tired from traveling to stay up late. Tomorrow night, the gala: costumes and a pageant. Nothing special has been planned for Sunday night. Almost all of the guests are leaving Monday. What . . ."

"Tomorrow they'll be up all night, and the jewelry will be on display, so that's out." He was thinking out loud. "Tonight or Sunday. I'd do it tonight. They'll sleep better." He reached for her hand. "Come over here and point out the Princess's room."

Her hand felt cold and she was shivering. "I'm sure that's the Princess's window, just under that gable. What are you going to do? Please tell me."

"I'm going up on the tower to wait." It was wholly dark in the room now. He could not see her face. "If he gets by Oriol and Lepic, I'll be watching for him. If he doesn't come tonight, I should be able to last until Sunday, unless they tear the place down to find me. If he doesn't come Sunday, I'll try to get to Italy before I'm picked up."

She said nothing. Her shivering increased.

He said, "Will you do one thing more for me?"

He thought she nodded. "Tell them I—Mr. Burns—told you I had to leave unexpectedly and had no time to say good-by. It will keep Paul from talking, and it ought to make them look for me somewhere else. If I get away with this, I'll owe you more thanks than I have time to give you. If not, I'm still grateful for what you've done. Good-by."

He left her standing by the window. He took Mr. Burns's bag across the hall and hid it under Paul's bed, where it might escape detection for a while, then went quickly and quietly to the window.

He had to squeeze to get to the ledge outside. He was on the opposite side of the wing from the *terrasse*. There were no lights in the garden below him. Stretching to his full height, he reached above his head and explored the old wall with his fingers until he found a crevice between the stones. He began to climb, a gray shadow against gray rock.

CHAPTER 7

M R. SANFORD was standing with Lepic and Oriol on the lawn where they could see the rise of the castle walls, explaining why any suggestion of thieves breaking into the Combe d'Or was nonsense. It was his firm opinion that once the castle doors had been closed and bolted for the night, nobody alive could enter his home except by dynamiting a way and not easily even then. The valet coughed at his elbow.

"Yes, yes, what is it?" he said.

"Mr. Burns, sir. He's wanted on the telephone. An urgent call."

"Burns?" Sanford said blankly. "Who the devil is Mr. Burns?"

"The friend of Mrs. Stevens and her daughter, sir."

"Oh, him. I didn't even know he was here. Ask Mrs. Sanford."

"I've already asked her, sir. She told me to speak to you."

George Sanford went reluctantly to search for his guest. Lepic accompanied him. When they found Mr. Burns's room empty and his luggage gone, he could not satisfy Lepic's curiosity. He had met Mr. Burns only once, casually. Mrs. Sanford had invited him to the gala at the request of Mrs. Stevens, or possibly Miss Stevens.

Mrs. Stevens was startled to find Lepic suddenly at her elbow, asking questions about Mr. Burns in a demanding way and with more signs of excitement than he had shown at the loss of her jewelry. She said, "He's a gentleman staying at my hotel, a friend of my daughter's."

Francie was no more helpful. She was lying in the dark in her room. She had a splitting headache, and did not want to talk with anyone. But she told Lepic of the message Mr. Burns had left for his hosts, that he had been called away unexpectedly without time to make his apologies. She did not know when or how he had left the château. She answered Lepic's questions listlessly.

Later Lepic took Oriol aside and said, "I think we've got him! Paul du Pré is missing, too. So is his car. The servants say he drove off in a hurry just about the time we arrived. Didn't you tell me he and Robie were close friends?"

"They used to be but I don't think Paul would help him beat the law. Besides, the description is all wrong. John had more hair and less belly, and it isn't his technique to smuggle in as a guest."

"Hairlines and bellies are easy to change," Lepic said impatiently. "So are techniques, if you can't get in any other way. I tell you, we've got him!"

"We've got somebody," Oriol conceded. "But I'm not convinced that it was John Robie."

"Who else would have a reason to run?"

"Any crook could recognize the Citroën and know we weren't making a social call." Oriol laughed without enjoyment. "You can go out and set your nets, *commissaire divisionnaire*. It won't be any worse than a waste of time. I'm going to stay here."

Lepic's face flushed. He turned on his heel and hurried away, across the lawn and through the gardens of the moat to the car park beyond. The Citroën roared off in a spray of gravel.

From his remote perch behind the crenelated tower top, John saw Lepic's departure. Paul returned only a few minutes later, while the *commissaire* was still on his way to put the *brigade mobile* in action. Oriol went to meet him, and the pantomime was clear. Oriol asked his question. Paul shook his head. Oriol asked other questions, Paul continued to shake his head. He knew nothing about Mr. Burns, and had an explanation for his own absence from the château.

Several hours later, John heard Oriol exploring the roof. Dinner was over, coffee and liqueurs had been served, and several couples were dancing to the music of a small orchestra that played on the terrace. Oriol intended to see for himself if Sanford's claims about the castle's impregnability were justified. He still did not believe that Le Chat would come to the Combe d'Or by invitation.

Working his way up through the château from the bottom floors, peering through windows and trying doors, he smiled wryly to himself at Sanford's boasts. The château might be successfully defended against armed assault, as Sanford claimed. But with its drainpipes, and ladders of ivy, it offered no protection against the entry of a man like John Robie.

John heard him first when the door at the base of the tower squeaked open on heavy hinges. Expecting that he might climb the stairs inside the tower to the trap door at the top, John cautiously dropped over the tower parapet to burrow into the screen of vine ten feet below. He hung there for a quarter of an hour, breathing through his mouth so the dust in the ivy leaves would not make him sneeze. But Oriol did not try the trap at the tower top. When John was certain that it was safe to move, he went back to his high perch. He was not disturbed again, and sat watching the dancing far below.

The orchestra stopped playing early, before midnight. By ones and twos the guests drifted away from the terrace until only Paul and the orchestra remained, finally only Paul.

He sat alone, smoking one cigarette after another, not moving until George Sanford came back to the terrace and spoke to him. Sanford's gestures said that he did not like to disturb his guest's solitude, but it was time to lock up. Paul followed him inside. The huge double doors of the castle swung shut. Bars dropped into place. Moments afterward the lights in the emerald pool

winked out, then those on the terrace. The Château Combe d'Or was sealed for the night.

There was no need to maintain a watch until the many lights of the castle windows went out. But John had a view of more than the rooftops.

For what it had been originally, a lookout point, the tower top was magnificent. There was no moon, and the brilliance of the lights marking the curving coast road along the Mediterranean was sharper in contrast with the velvet darkness of the night. Against the shadowy backdrop of the Estérel hills a necklace of light marked the grand sweep of seashore north and east from Théoule toward La Napoule and the blaze of illumination that was Cannes, continuing beyond to the clustered sparkle of Cap Ferrat. Beyond Cap Ferrat another, dimmer necklace marked the beginning of the Corniche road which led along the cliffs to Monte Carlo, Menton and the Italian border, sixty miles away. The whole Côte d'Azur lay under his eyes.

Sixty miles of jewels, he thought, and the hope that had carried him failed utterly. With a thousand opportunities at hand, it was beyond reason to expect the thief to come to the Combe d'Or.

But the thief had to come.

He did not doubt that he could last until Sunday night if it became necessary. He would have to remain on the tower top during the following day and most of the next night, but it would not be impossible to leave the château during the height of the gala and return before dawn. There were farms in the hills back of the Combe d'Or where he could find food and water. Lepic would have his net laid by morning, but it would cover roads and borders, not the near countryside. Oriol was the man he had most to fear.

The thought of Oriol made him turn from the lights of the coast line to watch the rooftops again.

Windows were darkening, one by one. As time passed, he could mark the tide of sleep rising in the castle by the way in which darkness came first to the lower floors, then to the master bedrooms and guest rooms, last of all to the dormer windows in the roof where the servants slept. When the bell rang to mark the passage of another half hour, there was only starlight to show him the faint sheen of the gray slate roofs.

The church bell pealed two thirty. The Combe d'Or slept, dark

and soundless. The air had begun to cool perceptibly. A breeze rustled the ivy.

He changed his cramped position without taking his eyes from the roof. The ivy rustled again. This time there was no breeze in his face. He thought, quite calmly, Careful. Don't make any mistakes now. Let him come.

The ivy whispered and whispered again. He felt his pulses beat with the intermittent movements of the climber on the vine. He began to breathe deeply through his open mouth, steadying himself for the effort to come. He bent to test the ties of his slippers, rubbed his palms on the rock of the parapet to dry them and roughen the skin, tightened his belt, flexed his fingers. The ivy whispered more loudly now; rustle, pause, rustle again, finally a pause that was not followed by another rustle. Only then did he risk exposing the outline of his head and shoulders against the sky. He looked down from the parapet and saw the shadowy figure below make its way unhesitatingly, surely, confidently, out on the sharp peak of the rooftop.

There was no need to wait longer, nothing left to plan. The time had come. He swung down the ivy in a surge of released tension.

The shadow was visible several yards ahead when he followed it. He had not been able to conceal the sounds of his descent from the tower top. He knew he had been seen, as much as anything could be seen in the starlit darkness. There was no identity to the shadow ahead except a dim grayness. He saw it only for a moment before it faded into blackness.

The disappearance did not worry him. The thief might dodge him for a while in the angles of the roof gables and turrets, but he was between the shadow and the ladder of ivy. To escape, the thief would have to leave the roof and make his way to the ground by some other means. He could not begin a descent without appearing on the eaves or attempting to work back toward the tower. John stood in his way.

It became a three-dimensional chess game, each move according to prescribed rules, following definite lines. Short cuts were impossible. A misstep on the slates would have sent either of them sliding helplessly, with only the gutters at the eaves to stop a fall. They could pass along the roof peaks, diagonally in the angle of joining gables, up and down the slope of roof corners, or by way

of the gutters. John did not move as rapidly as the thief. He was at a disadvantage in that he had to explore each shadow, study each pocket of darkness when he came to it so that he might not overrun his quarry, opening an escape to the tower behind. He meant to force the shadow down to the roof of the west wing, where there were no corners to hide in, no rising gables or descending angles to dodge across, nothing but a single roof peak, a straight line ending in sheer fall to the moat.

He almost missed the shadow lying flat and motionless at the outer end of a dormer he was about to pass. John moved out on the dormer peak, cautiously. He expected the thief to risk a swing down to the eave below and from there along the gutter or down the wall to the courtyard. He was not prepared for the soaring jump the thief made instead to an adjoining dormer.

It was a tremendous leap, one he would have hesitated to attempt himself. His own muscles tensed in an unconscious effort to assist the jumper. The thief failed to reach secure footing, came down heavily on the slates, slipped, and saved himself by catching at the peak of the dormer. Tiles split, slid and went clattering off the eave into the courtyard, to shatter on the terrace.

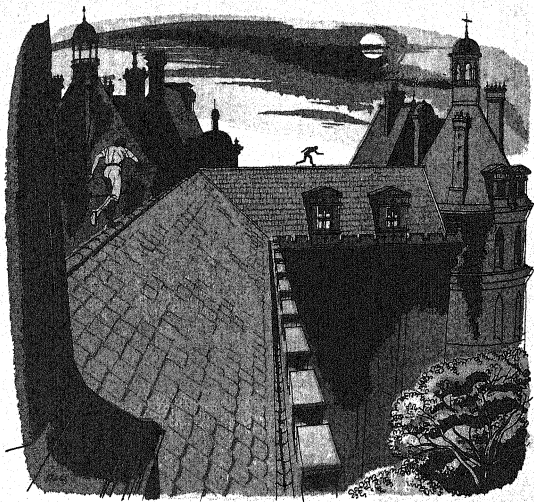
ORIOLE heard them fall. When the château had quieted down for the night, he had taken his post at a window in the east wing from which he could watch the windows of the Princess Lila's bedroom and Mimi Sanford's bedroom. When the slates fell, the chance of his position let him see the light that came on immediately in one of the roof dormers. He marked the position of the dormer and hurried up the stairs.

An angry man in a nightshirt answered his knock when he found the room he wanted. He was one of the cooks, who had to be up at five o'clock and needed his rest.

"How do I know what happened?" he grumbled. "*Mon Dieu*, what a household! As many guests to cook for as there are worms in the potatoes, no sleep . . ."

"What woke you?"

"A thump, dirt in my face, stars peeking at me through a hole in the roof. Right over the sack full of soup bones they give me for a bed, too. What do I do when it rains, eh? It's a situation calling for thought when a student of Escoffier and a citizen of the French Republic . . ."



He shrugged and went back to bed, muttering. Oriol was already running down the hall. His wind was gone when he climbed the last flight and unbarred the door at the base of the tower. He stopped to breathe on the narrow rampart, peering off across the rooftops.

The light in the dormer had gone out. He could see nothing except the beginning of a sharp roof peak leading off into darkness, but he knew how far the fall was on either side. He did not have a head for heights. But while he hesitated, still breathing hard, he heard slates slide and clatter again.

He had no light, no time to hunt for a light, and no stomach for rooftops in the dark, nothing to drive him but stubbornness and a mistake he meant to redeem. He set his jaw, lowered

himself from the rampart until he was astride the roof peak, and began to inch forward into the darkness.

JOHN had dislodged the second fall of slates. He was being driven to take increasing risks to keep the fleeing shadow ahead of him. The thief had seen his intention and was making every effort to escape the trap. He had not yet attempted going over the eaves, but there would be nothing else left for him once they were on the roof of the wing. Nimbleness of foot would not help him then. Only sureness of grip and strength of arms and shoulders counted on the wall. Still forcing toward that end, John lost sight of the shadow again.

He stopped, searching for it along the eaves, unwilling to move farther until he saw that he was not opening another way of escape. When he heard the scrape on the roof far behind him, he thought for a black moment that the escape had already been made. But immediately he caught sight of the shadow again, almost to the drop-off that would take it down to the wing, and knew that someone else was on the roof.

Oriol moved by hitching himself along the ridge peaks with his hands. He came like a turtle, with a turtle's steadiness of purpose. He could not keep his heels from scraping the slates, but he was not trying to be quiet. He knew Le Chat was ahead of him. He wanted Le Chat to know that he was coming.

He called into the darkness: "John!"

John recognized the voice, but even before Oriol called his name he had guessed who it was. As surely as Oriol knew that the noise on the rooftop meant Le Chat was there, so John knew that only one man had the dogged determination to hunt him there in the dark on his own ground. Oriol's voice came clearly across the rooftop: "Lepic has the net out for you. If you get away from me, you'll never escape him. Give yourself up."

There was silence. Then the patient scraping noise began again.

John moved ahead of it. The shadow was now at the extreme end of the roof, on the eave. There was no way to go from there except down the wing.

Because John was moving along the roof peak and had his back turned, he did not see the flash of the shot when Oriol worked a pistol out of his pocket and fired it into the air. The bright-red pencil of flame went straight up. Oriol meant to arouse the house-

hold, not kill another thief. All John saw with the echoing report of the shot was his own shadow outlined for an instant on the tiles. The flare that showed him to Oriol let him see that the other shadow was gone. Expecting the roar of another shot and the shock of the bullet in his back, he raced along the peak, down the slope of the last roof corner. He was over the eave before the gun banged again. He swung from the gutter and dropped, prepared to fall flat to either side of the roof peak below, according to the angle of the slate roof his feet met.

He did not fall. Hands reached out to steady him. He turned to seize and hold the figure beside him, and knew in the immediate moment of contact, unmistakably, that he had caught a woman.

Tight in the grip of his arms, not struggling, she whispered, "Let me go, John Robie. We have to help each other now."

"Danielle!"

Before he could even attempt to think, bring his mind to accept the stunning fact of the discovery, she said quickly, "There's the first light now. He'll be able to see us as soon as he reaches the eave. We have to get off the roof. I've got a rope."

She crouched on the peak where they stood. Another light came on somewhere above them. He heard the scrape of Oriol's approach on the roof above.

It released him from the momentary paralysis of thought. He took Danielle's arm and brought her erect beside him.

"There's no time to fix a rope," he said. "We'll have to go over the eave. I'll make a bridge for you. The wall isn't difficult."

The thought did not enter his head that he might get away more easily alone, or that he should try. Afterward he could not remember any conscious change of attitude in himself, from pursuer of a thief to the thief's ally. It seemed wholly natural to find himself providing a path of escape for the girl he had risked his liberty to give to the police. Now Oriol threatened them both.

He swung down from the eave at what he judged was the point he had come up. It took him a moment to find the handhold and toe hold he knew to be there. He was firmly braced between wall and eave when he felt Danielle's light touch on his fingers clinging to the gutter. He lifted one finger against her palm as a signal.

She came down from the eave and across his body to the wall like a squirrel, found a grip, held her own weight. He swung in behind her.

An angry voice shouted from a window. More lights were coming on. They heard Oriol call back, urgently, the angry voice replying, other voices.

He said, "Are you all right?"

"Yes." Danielle was flat against the wall by his side. "Shall I go first?"

"We don't have time to make it to the ground before they head us off. The first window is about twenty feet straight down, two yards to your left."

As if in response to a cue, the slit window below them lighted. Danielle said, "Someone is awake in the room."

"The whole place will be awake in a minute. It's Paul's room. He's our only hope."

A second window on the same floor with Paul's room showed a light, then another a floor below. Oriol was shouting urgently from the rooftop. They began to descend.

The room was empty when they squeezed in through the narrow slit window. Paul was outside, in the corridor. They heard his voice, and the voices of other guests aroused by the shots and the shouting. But no one passed the open doorway to see them before they had crossed the room, so when Paul, in pajamas and a dressing gown, came in, he found them there behind the door.

The color drained slowly from his face as he looked at them. Danielle was dressed, like John, in gray slacks and jersey and soft leather slippers. She wore a dark beret which hid her bright hair, and a length of strong, light line was wound around her slim waist like a belt. Even without the dust of the roof staining her clothes and John's to show where they had been and the way they had come, their clothing alone would have betrayed them for what they were, two thieves.

Paul closed the door, turned the key, then switched off the light.

"It's safer for you in the dark," he said, "and I'd rather not have to see you, if you don't mind."

They heard him sit on the bed. When he spoke again, minutes later, it was in the same lifeless tone. He said, "It would have been less cruel to tell me the truth when I asked you to, John."

John had his ear to the door, listening. He was too fully occupied to realize that Paul had come to a natural conclusion until Danielle said pleadingly, "Whatever else you think . . ."

John listened at the door. There were voices, but none nearby.

They could talk in safety. He told Paul all he could as briefly as possible, stopping now and then to listen at the door panel. At the end, he said, "I never lied to you, Paul. I didn't know anything more about Danielle than I said. I don't know any more about her now, except that she's what you thought I was."

Paul said, "Is it true, Danielle?"

"Yes." Her answer was barely audible.

They heard footsteps coming along the corridor, and two voices arguing. The low-voiced argument continued outside the door for a moment before someone knocked.

Paul said, "Who is it?"

"Oriol. I want to talk to you, Paul."

Paul turned on the light. Nothing in his expression told them what he meant to do. John reached for Danielle's arm to bring her against the wall, where they would be shielded by the door when it opened. It was as instinctive as everything else he had done since learning her identity.

Oriol and George Sanford were in the hall. Sanford looked angry, Oriol stubborn. He said to Paul, "John Robie was on the roof tonight. I almost got him. He didn't have time to get away from this wing, and I think he would come to you for help if he was trapped. Do you know where he is?"

John held his breath. Danielle was tense at his side.

Paul said, "John Robie would never risk coming to me if the police wanted him. Do you want to search my room?"

"No," said Oriol. "I know you don't lie, Paul. But you held something back from me last night when I asked you about Burns. I don't know what it was, but from now on I want the whole truth. I tell you plainly that John Robie is still hiding in the castle, and that he cannot possibly escape. He may try to come to you. If you seek to protect him in any way, your own arrest—"

"I won't permit such threats to my guest," Sanford broke in furiously.

Oriol ignored him. "For the present that is enough," he said coldly. "I'm sorry I disturbed you."

Paul stared at the door panel in front of his eyes until the footsteps went away. Then he shook his head quickly and turned to John and Danielle. He managed a strange smile. He said, "That puts us all on the same side, doesn't it? Two thieves and a liar. What do we do next?"

John let out his breath. Paul said, "I've heard John's part of the story now." He turned to Danielle. She bent her head to avoid Paul's eyes. John said, "Paul is entitled to know, as much as I am. We've both paid a high price to protect you, in our own ways."

She bit her lip. Afterward she gave no sign of emotion. She spoke calmly, always to John. Paul never took his eyes from her face.

Her story was much like John's own. The only difference between them was that she had been trained first for the ballet, as a child. Her parents had been wealthy enough to provide her with the long schooling they hoped would produce a star. It had been an apprenticeship to which she submitted without enthusiasm until she was thirteen, when a side wash of the war and a flight of bombers wiped out her family, leaving bare survival a problem for an adolescent girl in a devastated country occupied by an invading army.

"I had relatives in Switzerland," she said. "They brought me out of France, but they were poor, and practical. I had to support myself. The nearest thing they knew to the theater was a Swiss circus that came around the countryside once a year. I went with it."

It had been another kind of apprenticeship, more arduous than ballet. But her trained muscles and agility helped her. In time she learned acrobatics and the trapeze. From trapeze flying she graduated to the high wire, first as part of an act, ultimately to star billing as Monsieur Daniel, the Aerial Clown, with a mustache and baggy clothes to conceal her sex.

Although she still did not look at Paul, some change in her tone made both men realize she was talking to him now, not John. "I don't know when it was I decided to do what I did, if I ever made a decision. I don't think I had to. I wanted things: security, and leisure, and a nice life, not to be a performing monkey on a string three times a day. Another girl might have got away from it by finding different work. I didn't. I can't tell you why the idea of stealing didn't make me ashamed. I suppose people have different ideas of . . ."

Paul said, "You don't have to explain anything to me, and John must understand. Go on with the rest of it."

"At first I thought I could use Monsieur Daniel to hide behind. I did, in Switzerland. But there was nothing big to steal there,

and I didn't intend to be a thief any longer than necessary to get what I wanted, so I left the circus and came here. I had a new idea when I met Claude. I thought I could use him instead of playing the role of Monsieur Daniel, but Claude wasn't clever enough to trust. When I heard about Le Chat, it was exactly what I wanted: a real thief, known, photographed and identified. I read everything I could find about you and copied you in everything."

John said, "It would have been better for both of us if you had remained Monsieur Daniel. When did you identify me?"

"Not until tonight on the roof. Oriol called your name. Of course, I knew from the beginning that Mr. Burns didn't go to the casinos just to gamble hundred-franc counters. I thought you were probably an insurance detective, like Mr. Paige."

"I suspected you, for a while," John said. "But I thought Claude was your climber. I forgot that women don't develop the same kind of muscles. And you never let me touch you."

"I never let anyone touch me. It was too dangerous."

Paul said curiously, "Why?"

John took Paul's hand and put it on Danielle's shoulder, at the point where the muscle from the shoulder blade ran up into the neck. Under the softness of her flesh it was like a hard rope.

Paul said, "I see."

He left his hand on her shoulder. Danielle did not move away from the contact.

She said to John, "What else do you want to know?"

"Why did you come here when you knew I'd be here?"

"I told you I didn't know who you were. I wasn't afraid of Mr. Burns. Kind, innocent Mr. Burns, who introduced me to his . . . good friend Paul . . ." Her steady voice wavered and broke.

Paul's hand was still on her shoulder. He made her turn to look at him.

" . . . his good friend Paul, who had fallen in love with you and couldn't change if you had robbed the French treasury and burned it to the ground afterward," he finished. "This isn't the way I intended to ask you, but it will do. Will you marry me?"

She tried to say something, could not, and shook her head. He said, "I meant to ask you when I invited you here. All the things you wanted I can give you, if you'll have me, Danielle. I offered to buy John off when I thought he was the thief. Let me buy you."

She still could not answer him, only shake her head. The eagerness that had been in his face left it. He took his hand from her shoulder.

John said, "What else do you expect her to say, Paul? Give her a chance. You can't buy her out of trouble. She has to do that herself. Do you still have the jewelry, Danielle?"

She nodded.

"All of it? Unbroken?"

"Yes." She swallowed, and found it easier to talk. "I was going to take it to Holland and sell it there, after I got the pearls."

"You'll have to give it up. You can have Paul instead, if you want him, but they'll never stop hunting us until the jewelry is returned. If we turn it back—let me think for a minute. I've got an idea."

It did not come to him all at once that there was a way they could both go freely from the château. He only knew certainly that to end the search for the thief a return of the stolen jewels was essential. But he had had an idea for his own escape since Danielle said she thought Mr. Burns and Mr. Paige were working toward the same end. Mr. Paige had the influence and power of the London insurance company behind him. If that influence could be brought to their side, purchased with the free return of one hundred and twenty-five million francs' worth of jewelry . . . Paige was hardheaded . . . the recovery was what he wanted, not a conviction.

His mind raced over the possibilities. He could see his own way out. Francie would have to help again, with Danielle, if she was still on his side.

He looked at the window and saw that the sky was already light. "We'll have to wait until seven, at least. I've thought of a way to send you and Danielle out of here together. Never mind how. I'll tell you when I'm sure it will work. Where is the jewelry now, Danielle?"

"In my room. In a suitcase."

"That's what you'll pay to stay out of Lepic's hands then. As soon as you're safe, get the suitcase and take it to Bellini with a note I'll give you. After that, you and Paul are on your own. You can decide for yourselves where you want to go from there. Give me a pencil and paper, Paul."

He sat down and wrote the note to Bellini.

HE WROTE a second note which Paul carried to Francie's room shortly after six o'clock. The sun was up, and the heat of another blazing day had begun to make itself felt. It was a good beginning. Bad weather would have made his scheme more difficult.

When Paul returned, John said, "Did she ask any questions?"

"She read the note and said it would take her about half an hour. That's all. She didn't seem surprised."

"Good. Where is Oriol?"

"He's trying to reach Lepic by phone."

"You'll have to get away before Lepic comes, because he knows Francie by sight. Put on a pair of bathing trunks and a robe. The minute Francie gets here, you go. Start your car, and give Oriol plenty of time to notice that you're leaving. If he comes after you to ask why, tell him the seashore is the only place you can think of where you might escape insults from the police. Be unpleasant enough to show you haven't forgotten this morning. When Danielle gets down to the car, let him see her, but leave as quickly as you can without acting as if you were in a hurry."

"I know how to do my part. What about you?"

"I'll go a different way. I wouldn't be trying this if I weren't certain I could get out myself, so don't worry about me. There's nothing to do now but wait."

Paul changed in the bathroom and then they waited. The valet came by with a *petit déjeuner* of coffee and rolls. Paul took the tray at the door and they shared the breakfast, drinking from a single cup.

Danielle spoke hardly at all. She realized that what happened during the next few hours meant either an end or a beginning for her.

Francie arrived before they had finished the coffee. She wore her bathing suit with a beach robe over it. There were dark circles under her eyes. Nothing in her attitude indicated either reluctance or eagerness to play the part he had given her. She looked only once at Danielle, briefly, and asked no questions.

Paul left the room immediately. Francie said, "There are a few people on the terrace, but none near the pool. I put my toe in the water, then walked away. No one paid any attention. They're still talking about burglars."

John said to Danielle, "Roll up your slacks and put on the sandals."

Francie took off the sandals and gave them to Danielle, who put them on, then the beach robe, finally the bathing cap. With a towel tied like a scarf at her neck, she was effectively disguised. There was only a small difference in height to show that she was not the girl who had already appeared on the terrace to dip her toe in the swimming pool.

John said, "The rest is up to you and Paul. Cross the terrace when you get downstairs, go on by the pool, and get into Paul's car. Let Oriol look at you if he's there. He'll lose interest as soon as he sees you're a woman. Don't try to hide your face, and don't hurry."

"I understand."

"That's all, then. Get the jewelry and the note to Bellini as quickly as possible."

"You're putting a lot of faith in me, aren't you?" Danielle said.

"If you mean because you might not deliver the jewelry, I don't think so. You can't have it and Paul, too. You'd rather have him, wouldn't you?"

"Yes."

"Make him a good wife, Danielle. He deserves it."

After Daniellé had gone, John went to the window. He watched the circling road that descended from the hilltop, counting minutes. He feared most of all the bad luck of Lepic's arrival before they got away. If the Citroën came up the hill before Paul's car went down . . .

Francie said, "How are you going to get away yourself?"

"Bellini will buy me out with the jewelry."

"You're sure?"

"I'm sure; one hundred and twenty-five million francs is worth more than I am."

"It would have been easier for you to give her to the police, as you planned."

"I had to change my plans, Francie. I didn't know she was the thief."

"It makes a difference that it was Danielle?"

There was still no sign of a car coming in either direction. He said, "It makes a difference that Paul is in love with her. But right now I'm not sure I could have turned anyone over to the police. Hunting a thief is one thing. Sending him to prison is something else. I know what prison is like."

"If Bellini can't do what you expect him to do, you'll go back. You know that, too, don't you?"

"I know Bellini's capabilities."

"I'm glad you have faith in him. Is there anything more you want from me?"

"No. The rest of it is up to Bellini."

He heard the motor first, then saw the car, Paul's car, going down the road. It passed quickly out of his sight, but he watched the road for another full minute for signs of pursuit before he turned from the window. "They made it," he said. "Now . . ."

Francie had gone.

It surprised him only because he had not heard her go. Because he knew the chambermaid would come by soon to make up the room, he got his suitcase out from under Paul's bed, made sure no one was in the corridor, and took the bag across the hall to his own room, which the maid would not need to visit. There he brought Mr. Burns back to life for his final appearance, put on the padded shoes and harness, touched the roots of his hair with dye for the last time. He watched the terrace and saw Francie leave the château an hour later.

Francie was showing good judgment. Her mother's innocence would be obvious to anyone who questioned her, but she herself could not safely remain to explain, if it occurred to anyone to ask who it was that had left the château wearing her beach robe and sandals. He felt better to know that she was gone, free from possible trouble.

He waited for Bellini to bring Mr. Paige. There was never any doubt in his mind about Bellini.

Lepic arrived at the château first. He, Oriol and George Sanford were talking on the terrace, Oriol pointing to the rooftops, then to the wing, Sanford shaking his head in disagreement at something Oriol said, when Bellini's heavy old Hispano-Suiza came purring up the hill. Bellini and Mr. Paige got out and came side by side across the lawn toward the three men on the terrace. Even from his window, John could see the beaming, happy smile on Bellini's round face.

BELLINI remained unobtrusively in the background. He had coached Mr. Paige carefully along the general lines of what was to be said, but the phrasing was Mr. Paige's.

He introduced himself to George Sanford. "Paige," he said crisply. "I represent the London insurance company. This gentleman is Mr. Bellini. Good morning, Commissioner."

George Sanford said wearily, "This is all utter nonsense, Mr. Paige. I don't know what you may have heard, but I assure you there has been no theft of any kind. You're all making a fuss about nothing at all. If I sound rude, I'm sorry, but you're also causing me and my guests a great deal of embarrassment."

Lepic said, "If there wasn't a theft, it's only because Oriol was here to prevent it. He saw a man on the roof. And if you can see the hole where he fell, as he says, there's no argument."

"A hole on the roof?" Mr. Paige twirled his mustache tip. "I'm afraid my principals will have to assume responsibility for the repairs, then, if for nothing else. I rather fancy it was my own man who caused the damage."

Lepic said, "Your *what*?"

Mr. Paige twirled the other mustache tip. "My operative," he said. He was enjoying himself. He had not forgotten Lepic's cold treatment of him at the commissariat. "Mr. Burns."

Lepic's face went suddenly gray. George Sanford's chin dropped. Oriol, who could not follow the conversation in English, said to Lepic, "What is it?"

Lepic paid no attention.

"Where is he?" Mr. Paige asked pleasantly.

Sanford said, "Why, I don't know. He disappeared last night. We thought— I'm afraid I still don't understand, Mr. Paige. You say he was your operative?"

"An operative of my company, to be exact." Mr. Paige twirled both mustache points simultaneously. "He has been working with me, and Mr. Bellini"—Bellini bowed, beaming—"for some time to effect a recovery of the jewelry stolen here on the Côte during the past months. Until this morning, I confess we were not wholly convinced that Commissioner Lepic had disposed of the thief, and for that reason I thought it wise to put my own man here to protect our interests and those of your guests who are our clients, particularly Mrs. Sanford and the Princess Lila." Mr. Paige coughed gently. "Had I known that Commissioner Lepic intended to take the same steps himself, my own precautions would not have been required. I seem to have misjudged Mr. Lepic in more ways than one."

Lepic's face was like a dead man's. Mr. Paige went on, "Your action in shooting the thief was not as unfortunate as I believed it to be at the time, Commissioner. His death permitted his friends, who held the stolen jewelry for him, to take advantage of one of my *récompense-proportionnelle* advertisements of which you were so doubtful. The reward was claimed this morning." He paused long enough to make the effect he wanted. "The stolen jewelry has been recovered. I have already given the news to the papers."

Oriol said in Lepic's ear, "What's going on? What's he saying?" "The jewelry came back!"

Oriol was as stunned as Lepic had been. But Lepic, with a few seconds to react, sensed that a game was being played on him. He said flatly, "I don't believe it."

"I assure you that I have inspected it myself and found everything in order, including some pieces not insured by my company. Of course, I have had no way to verify those against inventory, but I have every reason to trust the good faith of the man who surrendered the jewels to me."

"Who?"

"One of the guarantees explicitly offered in the advertisements, as you will remember, Commissioner . . ."

"Who was it?" Lepic said fiercely.

" . . . is that no questions would be asked," Mr. Paige finished. "The reward has been paid, the jewels will be returned to their owners by me, and you yourself have ended the thief's potentialities for crime, Commissioner. There seems to be no need now for anything else except to offer apologies for the small deception it was necessary to play on Mr. Sanford and to ask Mr. Burns—ah, here he comes now. Good morning, Burns."

"Good morning, Mr. Paige." John came across the terrace on cue. "Good morning, Mr. Bellini."

"I'm delighted to see you again, Mr. Burns," Bellini said, chuckling. "Delighted."

JOHN DID not feel safe until he and Bellini were in the car, on their way down the curving hill road. The strain of the few minutes on the terrace had been enormous. He had not dared to meet Oriol's eyes. He knew that Oriol had recognized him at once, but Oriol's mind worked slowly. The return of the stolen

jewelry destroyed the whole foundation for his belief in John's guilt, and without it he did not know what to believe. He retreated to the only safe ground he knew, silence.

Lepic was certain of only two things: that Mr. Burns was not what Mr. Paige said he was, and that he could not jeopardize his career by challenging Mr. Paige until he knew more. His uncertainty kept him baffled during the time it took John to apologize to his dazed host for his deception and leave with Bellini. Mr. Paige remained to act as rear guard and invent explanations as required.

"Lepic gave him several uncomfortable moments," Bellini said. "He's getting his own back." He wheezed and giggled. "Did you see Lepic's expression when you came across the terrace?"

"I was watching Oriol," John said. "He was the only one who really worried me. He's a bulldog."

"Bulldogs are not a breed to take action without being sure of themselves. Lepic is more of a danger to you, still."

"I don't see how he can be. He's committed himself to the point where keeping his mouth shut and accepting the credit is the only alternative to exposing his own mistakes. Oriol can still send me away any time he wants to. He'll have to know the truth before I can go back to the Villa des Bijoux."

"Telling the *flics* the truth is always a mistake. However, Oriol is also a *maquisard*. It can be arranged for him to learn a small part of it, enough to restore your position with him." Bellini wagged his head, tittering. "Not everything, of course. It is hardly believable. Who would have suspected that our lovely Danielle was so clever?"

BEFORE Bellini let him off at the hotel, he repeated something he had told John before.

"Yours is not a subtle mind, John. It functions well enough, but the line is single-tracked. You have been preoccupied for a long time by something to which you had necessarily to devote yourself. Now you have time to think of more than the survival of yourself and your friends. Consider this question: Do you really want to go back to your old life at the Villa des Bijoux?"

"I don't have to consider it. I know."

"Think about it just the same, and let me hear your final answer later. In the meantime, give my regards to Miss Stevens."

John puzzled over the question while he was crossing the lobby, in the elevator, and as he walked down the corridor to Francie's room. He could not decide exactly what Bellini meant by it. The implication seemed to be that he might find life at the Villa des Bijoux drab after his spell of activity as Mr. Burns; that, having once returned to thievery, or pseudothievery, he would not be able to go back again to the garden and the dog and the books. But that was nonsense. Thieving had never been more than a business to him, a means to an end, as Mr. Burns had been. There was nothing he wanted that he could not find at the Villa des Bijoux. Or so he believed until he knocked on Francie's door, and for an interval afterward, when she had let him in and before he saw the evidence of her hurried packing. But he did not fully understand the significance of Bellini's question until he had asked his own.

"I'm flying back to the States this afternoon," she answered.

He knew then, all at once, not with his single-track mind alone but in his heart and stomach. Even then, it took time for him to realize that she was running away from him, and, at long last, why.

He said, "What about your mother?"

"She's staying. I've decided it's time she learned to take care of herself. If she can't, it's the insurance company's worry, not mine.. Not any more."

She faced him, her hands clasped in front of her, unsmiling, waiting for him to go. Her hair was disarranged, and there was a smudge of dust on her cheek. It was the first time he had seen her looking like that, the first time he had seen her at all.

He said, "I got away. It's all finished."

"I'm glad."

"Bellini sent his regards."

"That's nice."

She was still waiting for him to leave. He said bluntly, "Why are you going back to the States?"

"It's my home."

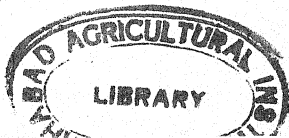
"Do I have anything to do with your going?"

"No."

"Would you stay if I asked you to?"

"No."

"Will you come back?"



"No."

"I can follow you."

"It would be a waste of time."

"I'll have to waste it then." He pulled up a chair and sat down with his arms crossed on its back. "Go on with your packing, if your mind is made up. Bellini says I've got a one-track mind, and I know what I want, even if I'm late in finding it out."

"What do you want?"

"You."

"Didn't you hear me say you can't have me?"

It did not discourage him that she had put up another of her protective barriers between them, because he knew how to surmount barriers when the need was desperate. But he was clumsier than usual. The chair he had been sitting in went over with a bang before he reached Francie's side.





David Dodge

DAVID DODGE, author of some of the merriest writing of our day, started his career, surprisingly, as a public accountant. The year was 1935, and Mr. Dodge felt, he says, that this sobersides employment was preferable to starving—though only just.

For seven years, until he joined the Navy after Pearl Harbor, Mr. Dodge labored over his double entries, using his knowledge in two detective stories—*Death and Taxes* and *Shear the Black Sheep*. The detective stories in turn brought him an unexpected capital gain—his publisher's West Coast representative, Elva Keith, whom he married in 1936. A third detective story, *Bullets for the Bridegroom*, helped pay for a new Dodge named Kendal in 1940.

After the war, the family started on a series of travels which have lasted ever since, and which have more than paid for themselves in humorous best-selling travel books like *How Green Was My Father* and *20,000 Leagues Behind the 8 Ball*. Perhaps the best known is *The Poor Man's Guide to Europe*, first published in 1953 and still, through annual revisions, going strong.

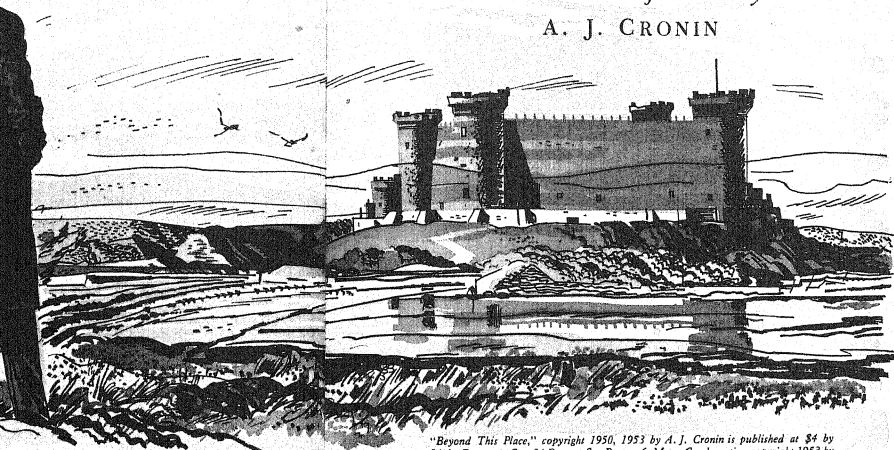
Alfred Hitchcock made *To Catch a Thief* into a highly successful motion picture starring Grace Kelly and Cary Grant. The filming took place on the Riviera, and provided the occasion for the first meeting of Miss Kelly and Prince Rainier of Monaco.



Beyond This Place

A condensation of the book by

A. J. CRONIN



Illustrations by Isa Barnett

"Beyond This Place," copyright 1950, 1953 by A. J. Cronin is published at \$4 by Little, Brown & Co., 34 Beacon St., Boston 6, Mass. Condensation copyright 1953 by The Reader's Digest Assn., Inc.

Beyond This Place is the story of a young man in a terrifying situation. Alone and penniless in a strange city, Paul Mathry was intent on proving that his father had been unjustly convicted of a horrible murder. But somewhere in the city, he knew, were powerful people determined that he should not unravel the past: people who sent him threats, who set the machinery of the law in motion against him, who left him with no allies except the mysterious Lena—a girl with a dark secret of her own.

Beyond This Place illustrates the author's belief that the courts can sometimes be guilty of shocking injustice to innocent men. Rich in drama, with an unusual love story, it is A. J. Cronin at his storytelling best.

"An absorbing and powerfully written story."

—John Barkham in

Saturday Review Syndicate

"Very entertaining . . . highly dramatic."

—Sterling North in *New York*

World-Telegram and The Sun



CHAPTER 1

On Wednesday evenings Paul's mother took the tram from her work in the City Hall to the midweek service at Merrion Chapel and he usually walked over from the University, after his five-o'clock philosophy class, to meet her as she came out. But on this particular Wednesday, his interview with Professor Slade kept him late and he decided to go straight home.

It was June, and the lovely expectant evening had imposed a spell upon the begrimed buildings of Belfast. Framed against the amber sky, the roofs and chimney stacks of the northern Irish city lost their prosaic outlines and became mysterious, resplendent as a city in a dream.

As Paul came up Larne Road where he lived with his mother in a three-room apartment, a surge of elation took hold of him. He felt suddenly the breath-taking beauty and promise of life. Standing for a moment at his door, an unassuming young man, bareheaded, in a worn tweed suit, he filled his lungs with the soft, still air. Then, briskly, he turned and put his latchkey in the lock.

The canary was singing in the kitchen. Whistling to the bird, he put the kettle on to boil and began to see about supper. A few minutes later the clock on the mantelpiece struck seven, and he heard his mother's step. He greeted her gaily as she came in, a spare and enduring figure clad in respectable black, bent a little to one side by her indispensable "hold-all" bag.

"Sorry I couldn't get to chapel, Mother," he smiled, "but

Professor Slade's given me the job teaching in the summer school. At least, I'm almost sure of it."

Mrs. Burgess studied him. The impression of weariness created by her lined features and intent, nearsighted eyes melted gradually under his frank and cheerful gaze. It was, she thanked God, a good face, open and straight-featured: cheekbones too prominent, but with a healthy complexion, clear, very light gray eyes, and a broad forehead set off by close-cropped brown hair.

"I'm glad it's settled, son. I knew you'd have good reason for not coming. But Ella and Mr. Fleming missed you." Emmanuel Fleming, pastor of Merrion Chapel, was their oldest friend.

She brought from her satchel some cold ham wrapped in wax paper and a bag of his favorite wheaten scones. They sat down and, when she had asked the blessing, began their simple meal. He saw that, despite her restraint, she was deeply pleased.

"It is a stroke of luck, Mother. Three guineas a week. And for the whole nine weeks of my holidays."

"God is very good to you, Paul."

He remarked: "I'm to send in my birth certificate tonight."

There was a pause. Head bent, she took her spoon and removed a tea leaf floating in her cup. Her voice was a little indistinct.

"What do they want with a birth certificate?"

"Oh, a pure formality," he answered lightly. "They won't engage students under twenty-one. I'd some difficulty in persuading Slade that I came of age last month."

"You mean he wouldn't take your word?"

He looked across in sharp surprise. "Mother! That was a little uncalled-for. The man's only obeying the regulations."

Mrs. Burgess did not answer, and Paul, when he had finished his tea, rose from the table. Only then did his mother stir.

"Paul," she detained him, unexpectedly, "I'm . . . I'm not sure, after all . . . that I like this idea."

"What!" he exclaimed. "Why, for weeks we've both been hoping I'd go."

"It means your being away from me." She hesitated and again looked down. "You'll miss our week's holiday with the Flemings. Ella will be disappointed. It will be too much for you."

"Nonsense, Mother. You worry about nothing." Before she could protest further, he went to fill out the application in his own room.

"Will you get the certificate for me now, Mother?" he said when he returned to the living room. "I want to catch the nine-o'clock post."

She was still seated at the table. Her face seemed flushed, her voice pitched in an unusual key. "I scarcely know where it is. It's not a thing you can put your hands on at a moment's notice."

"Oh, come, Mother." His glance flew to the chest where she kept all her papers. "It must be in your top drawer."

She gazed back at him, her mouth slightly open. Then, rising, she took a key from her purse, and unlocked the top drawer of the chest. She searched methodically for five minutes, then shut the drawer and turned around. "No," she said, in an expressionless manner, "I can't find it. It isn't there."

He bit his lip in annoyance. "Really, Mother, it's an important document. And I need it."

"How was I to know you needed it?" Her voice trembled with sudden resentment. "These things get lost. You know the struggle I've had, a widow all these years, worrying half the time whether I could keep a roof over our heads, let alone educate you properly. I've had enough to do without bothering about a few papers."

This outburst, altogether foreign to her controlled nature, took him aback. In a quiet tone, he said: "Fortunately it's possible to get a duplicate. By writing to Somerset House in London. I'll do it tonight."

She made a gesture of negation. Her voice was calmer now.

"It's not your place to write, Paul. I'll send for it tomorrow."

DURING THE next two days Paul was fully engaged, as Queen's University was breaking up for the long vacation. Once or twice his thoughts reverted to the recent scene with his mother and, watching her, he thought she seemed paler than usual, given to moods of queer abstraction. Of course, she had always been a highly strung woman—he recollected how, in their early days in Belfast, a sudden knock on the door would make her start. But this was different: now a consuming anxiety seemed pressed upon her brow. On Thursday morning he asked her if she had received an answer from Somerset House. She replied simply: "No."

There could be nothing wrong. Yet he was puzzled, and began to seek an explanation of her behavior in his own past history.

The first five years of his life he had spent in the North of

England, in Tynecastle. This was a blurred background lit by the glowing recollection of his father, a gay and incomparably friendly figure, who on Sundays took him by the hand to the park called Jesmond Dene to sail little paper boats in the pond; who, when he was tired, seated him upon a park bench in the shade and made wonderful sketches of everything around; and who on weekdays brought him home colored marzipan fruits, delicious to admire and eat, made by the confectionery firm which employed him as traveling salesman.

After Paul's fifth birthday they had moved to the great Midland city of Wortley: a grayer and less happy memory, mingled with smoke and rain and moving about, the glare of steel foundries and the moody faces of his parents, climaxed by the departure of his father on a business trip to South America. There was the suspense of waiting for his return, and then the unimaginable grief on hearing of his death in a railway disaster near Buenos Aires.

Not yet six years old, he had come to Belfast. Here, through the good offices of Emmanuel Fleming, his mother had found work in the City Health Department. The salary was small, but it had enabled the widow, by some miracle of economy and self-denial, to educate her son for the teaching profession.

It had seemed to Paul that the very intensity of his mother's effort constricted their life in Belfast to the narrowest limits. She barely knew their next-door neighbors. Pastor Fleming and Ella apart, she had no intimates. She had even frowned upon his own friendships at the University. When, a year before, he had been invited to play in the international Rugby game between Ireland and England, she had positively refused to allow him to accept.

In the past he had credited his mother's protectiveness mainly to her extreme and watchful piety. But now, in the light of her present conduct, he wondered if there were not another cause. Considering the quiet pattern of her existence, its shrinking from all contacts, he saw it, with a start of apprehension, as the life of one who has something to conceal.

On Saturday, which was her half holiday, she came in from her work at two o'clock. By this time he had made up his mind to have the matter out with her. Her appearance really startled him: her face was quite gray. But she seemed composed.

"Have you had lunch, son?"

"I had a sandwich at the Union."

There was a pause, then he straightened himself, tensely grasping the arms of his chair.

"Mother, we can't go on like this. There's something wrong. Tell me, did you get that certificate this morning?"

"No, son. I didn't. I didn't even write for it."

The blood rushed to his face. "Why not?"

"Because I had it all the time. It's here now, in my bag." She fumbled in her satchel and brought out a blue-gray paper. "All these years I've fought to keep it from you, Paul. At first every step on the stairs made me tremble. Then, as the years went on, I fancied with the help of God I had won through. But it was not His will. The pastor says you are a man now. You must know the truth."

Her agitation had increased with every word. Her hand quivered as she held out the paper. He saw immediately that the name there was not his. Instead of *Paul Burgess* he read *Paul Mathry*.

He looked from the paper to her. "What does it mean?"

"When we came here I took my maiden name of Burgess. I am Mrs. Rees Mathry, you are Paul Mathry. But I wanted to forget that name." Her lips twitched. "I wanted you to be out of sight and sound of it forever."

"Why?"

She began to weep. Without looking at him she said: "Your father did not die on a trip to South America. He was trying to get there when the police arrested him."

Of all things that he had expected this was the last. His heart bounded into his throat. "For what?" he faltered.

"For murder."

There was a stillness in the little room. Paul's question came in a whisper: "Then . . . he was hanged?"

She shook her head, her eyes filmed with hatred.

"Better for us if he had been. He was sentenced to death . . . then reprieved. He is a life convict in Stoneheath Prison."

He saw that it was torture for her to proceed.

"Don't force me to go on, son. Mr. Fleming promised me he'd tell you everything. Go to him. He expects you now."

PASTOR FLEMING'S house stood in the busy heart of Belfast. In answer to Paul's knock the hall light was turned on and Ella Fleming admitted him.

"Come along in, Paul," she said. "Father's with a parishioner but he won't be long."

Ella was two years older than Paul, yet she had a somewhat girlish air. Her eyes, of a grayish green, were large and expressive—but on occasion they could fill with tears and spark with temper, too. She was naturally talkative, and keeping house for her widowed father had given her a certain social assurance.

She showed him to the parlor, a low-ceilinged room with dark-red curtains and horsehair furnishings.

"I'll tell Father you're here," she said.

She went out of the room and a moment later Emmanuel Fleming appeared. He was a man of about fifty, with thick shoulders and big clumsy hands. With meaningful affection, he took Paul by the arm and led him to his study. Having seated his visitor, the pastor took his own place slowly at the desk. He hesitated for some time, then began: "My dear boy, this has been a frightful shock to you. But the great thing to remember is that it is God's will. With His help you'll get over it."

Paul swallowed dryly.

"I can't get over it till I know something about it."

There was a silence. Pastor Fleming rested his elbow on the desk, shading his eyes with his big hand, as though engaged in inward prayer for help. He spoke in a troubled tone: "Twenty-two years ago, Paul, in Tynecastle, I married Rees Mathry to Hannah Burgess. Hannah I had known for some years. Rees I did not know, but he was a well-mannered, engaging man. I had every reason to believe them happy, especially when you were born to them."

He paused, as though weighing his words with care.

"I will not deny, however, that there were rifts in the harmony of the home. Your mother was strictly religious; she was firmly set against the use of wine and tobacco in the house—a prejudice your father could never fully understand. Again, your father's work frequently took him away from home which had, perhaps, an unsettling influence upon him. He was a handsome, likable fellow and he made friends of whom one could not always approve. Still, I had nothing serious against him until the terrible events of the year 1921."

He sighed and pressed his thick finger tips together.

"In January of 'twenty-one your parents moved with you to Wortley. A few months previously, I had been transferred to Bel-

fast, but I still kept in touch with your mother by correspondence. Your life in Wortley was, from the first, unsettled. Your father seems to have resented his removal by the company to a district which appeared to offer him less scope. Wortley is a gray, unprepossessing city and your mother never liked it. They could not find a suitable house and occupied a succession of furnished rooms. Suddenly, in September, on the ninth of that month, to be precise, your father announced that he had reached the end of his patience. He proposed to throw up his job and emigrate straightaway to the Argentine—there would be a better chance for all of you there. He booked three passages for the fifteenth of September. On the thirteenth he sent you and your mother to Liverpool in advance, to await him. Late on the night of the fourteenth he left Wortley by train to join you. But when he reached the Liverpool station the police were on the platform. After a violent struggle, he was arrested and lodged in jail—the charge was willful murder.”

There was a long, tense pause. Paul, hunched in his chair, was like a hypnotized figure. Then the minister resumed:

“On the night of September eighth, between eight and eight ten p.m., Mona Spurling, an attractive young woman employed in a florist’s shop, was brutally murdered in the flat which she occupied at Fifty-two Ushaw Terrace in Eldon, a near suburb of Wortley. Returning from work, Miss Spurling had apparently eaten a light meal, then changed into a negligee, in which she was found. At eight o’clock a man named Albert Prusty in the flat below heard sounds of violence coming through the ceiling and went up to investigate. He knocked loudly on the door but received no answer. He was standing on the landing when a young man named Edward Collins came up the stairway to deliver a package of laundry. Just as Collins joined him, the door opened, a man came out of the Spurling apartment, brushed past them, and dashed down the stairs. They hastened into the sitting room, where they found Miss Spurling, her head almost severed from her body, stretched on the hearthrug in a pool of blood.

“Immediately, Mr. Prusty ran for the nearest doctor. He came at once, quite uselessly, since Miss Spurling was already dead. The police were sent for, and within a few hours three clues came to light. Detective Inspector Swann discovered in the bureau a pencil-sketched picture post card posted only a week before from

Sheffield, which bore the following words: *Absence makes the heart grow fonder. Won't you meet me for supper at Drury's when I return?* It was signed *Bon-bon*.

"Also he found a note, partly destroyed, and unsigned, dated September eighth, which said: *I must see you tonight*. Finally, lying on the hearthrug beside the body was a peculiar moneybag made from a soft and unusually fine leather. It contained some ten pounds in silver and notes. Promptly, from particulars given by Edward Collins and Albert Prusty, a description of the wanted man was issued, offering a large reward for information leading to his apprehension.

"On the following day a local laundrywoman came to the police station with one of her ironers, a girl of seventeen named Louisa Burt. It appeared that Louisa, a friend of Edward Collins, the laundryman, had accompanied him to Ushaw Terrace on the night of the crime, and while waiting down in the alleyway had been almost knocked down by a man running out of Number Fifty-two. She gave the police a description of this individual. The police had now three witnesses who had seen the murderer."

Pastor Fleming turned upon the young man his troubled gaze.

"It is not pleasant to touch on certain matters, Paul, but they are, alas, only too relevant. Mona Spurling was not a moral woman—she knew many men in her loose way. The other assistants in the flower shop where she worked recalled that Mona had recently seemed worried and low-spirited, that she had been overheard at the telephone using such phrases as *You are responsible*, and *If you leave me now I'll give the whole show away*. Finally, the post-mortem examination of the body revealed the unhappy fact that the murdered woman was pregnant. The motive was now established. When threatened with exposure, her lover had written to make an assignation, and had killed her.

"Reproductions of the sketched picture post card signed *Bon-bon* were now displayed in all the newspapers. All railway stations and ports of embarkation were closely watched. Then, late on the evening of the thirteenth, a bookmaker's clerk named Harry Rocca sought out the Chief Constable and, in a state of considerable agitation, volunteered to make a statement. He confessed to an intimacy with the dead woman and stated that he knew the sender of the post card—a friend with whom he often played billiards who had a marked talent for sketching. Some time before,

he had introduced this man to Mona Spurling. Moreover, when the reproductions of the post card appeared in the daily press his friend had asked him to back him up, saying: 'If anyone asks where I was on the night of September eighth, make out I was playing pool with you.'

"That, of course, was enough. The Superintendent of Police immediately proceeded to the address which Rocca gave them. There they learned that the person they wanted had boarded the Liverpool express only an hour before. The arrest, at Liverpool, followed inevitably. The man, Paul, was your father."

Again there was silence. Then the minister went on:

"It so happened that Albert Prusty was confined to bed with asthma, but the two other witnesses were immediately taken to Liverpool. There, from a dozen assembled persons, they unhesitatingly picked out your father as the man they had seen on the night of the murder.

"The trial began on the fifteenth of December at Wortley. One after another, witnesses gave their damning evidence. Search of your father's trunks had resulted in discovery of a razor which medical experts for the Crown proved to be the instrument of the crime. A handwriting expert testified that the half-destroyed rendezvous note found in the murdered woman's flat had been written, left-handed, by your father. He had many times been seen in the florist's shop, laughing and chatting with Miss Spurling. The attempted flight to the Argentine, his vicious resistance of the police, all bore heavily against him. Most damning of all was his fatal attempt to establish a false alibi with Rocca. And when he took the stand, he was a poor witness on his own behalf, contradicting himself, losing his temper, even shouting at the judge. He could not properly account for his movements at the hour of the crime, asserting that he had spent part of the evening at a cinema. But this pitiful excuse was riddled by the Prosecuting Counsel. Amid the darkness only one faint gleam shone in his favor. Albert Prusty, while admitting that your father resembled the man who ran from the flat, would not swear that he was the actual person. However, it came out that Prusty's eyesight was bad.

"The summing up of the judge, Lord Oman, went dead against the accused. The jury was absent only forty minutes. The verdict was *Guilty*. Your father struggled and raved as the warders took him away.

"Although no one dared expect it, on the eve of the execution your father's sentence was commuted to life imprisonment and he was removed to Stoneheath Prison."

Paul wiped his forehead with the handkerchief crumpled in his damp hand. "No one has seen him . . . since he went in there?"

The minister sighed. "At first I tried to keep in touch through the prison chaplain but he met my advances with such resentment, even ferocity, that I was forced to discontinue them. As for your mother, she judged it better to obliterate this awful chapter from your life. Unfortunately, she has not succeeded. Now I want you to cleanse your mind of the matter. You must go forward as though all that I have told you had never been."

A WEEK had passed since the interview in Fleming's study. It was Sunday afternoon, and the Scripture class Paul taught at Merrion Chapel was over. Ella stood waiting for Paul to join her. Usually, before their regular Sunday stroll, Paul would sit down at the little organ and play for her—he had more than average talent—but today such a performance was beyond him. For that matter, he had little wish to go walking, and as they passed through the gates of the park he muttered in a strained voice: "I'm not in the mood for this."

Ella looked vexed at this, but kept silent. Her affections had long been centered upon him. Paul himself had drifted into the relationship out of careless good humor, but all Ella's plans for the future were based upon the certainty of their marriage. She was highly ambitious both for herself and for him, and the recent disclosure had been a severe injury to her pride. She saw also how great had been the shock for Paul. Yet if she was willing to get over it why should not he? A touch of grievance, even of annoyance, began to qualify her sympathy.

"It seems as if all these years I've been living under false pretenses," he said, trying to give form to his tormenting thoughts. "I can't even call myself Burgess any more. But if I use the name Mathry, everywhere I go I'll imagine people whispering about me, 'That's Mathry, son of the man who—'"

"Don't, Paul," she interrupted. "You're making it too hard for yourself. No one need ever know."

"Even if they don't, I know. What about me . . . what am I going to do about it?"

Her patience was wearing thin. "It's perfectly simple. You must put away all thought of . . . this man Mathry."

He turned to her. "Disown my father?"

"Is he someone to be proud of?"

"Whatever he's done, he has paid for it . . . poor devil."

"I was only thinking of you," she answered sharply. "And kindly do not swear in my presence."

"I didn't say anything."

"You did." She could contain herself no longer. The blood rushed into her face. She snapped at him. "You used a word no lady would tolerate. I think you're behaving inexcusably." She drew up suddenly, overcome by her sense of injury. "I'm afraid there's no point in our walking any farther."

He gazed at her numbly. "Just as you please."

Disconcerted at being taken at her word she swung round and moved off. When she was lost to view, he moved off slowly in the other direction.

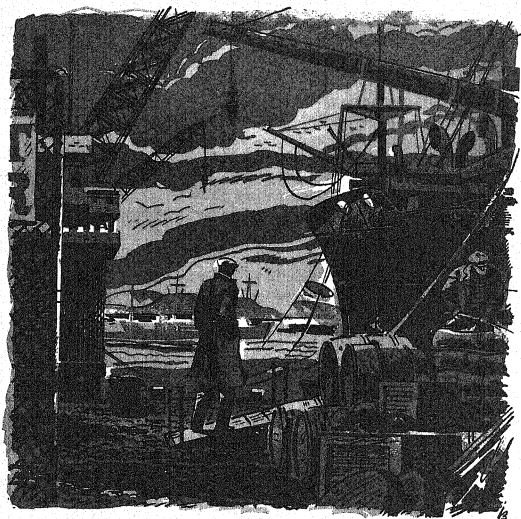
He could not endure to return home. There he would find his mother awaiting him with anxious, unbearable solicitude. How strange was his new attitude to his mother! But stranger still, and more illogical, was the feeling toward his father. Here was the cause of all his misery, yet Paul could not hate him. Instead, his thoughts had flown toward him with pity. Fifteen years in prison—was not that punishment enough for any man? Recollections of his childhood surged upon him. Tears blurred his vision.

He had now reached Donegal Quay, the dockside district of the city. Head down, he tramped along the cobbled wharves. An evening mist was stealing in from the sea, turning the tall pier derricks into spectral shapes.

At last, brought up by a barrier of merchandise piled between the sheds, he sat down on a packing case. Immediately opposite, a small rusty freighter was making preparations for departure—he recognized her as the *Vale of Avoca*, a cross-channel steamer plying between Belfast and Holyhead in Wales.

A sudden excitement, strange and predestined, passed over Paul. Impulsively, he took out his notebook and scribbled: *I am going away for a few days. Do not worry. Paul.*

He tore out the page, folded it over, and wrote his mother's name and address on the back. He found a boy to whom he gave the note with a coin to insure delivery. Then he walked over to the



shipping company's kiosk, and purchased a ticket for Holyhead. They were already casting off as he crossed the gangplank.

IT WAS six o'clock next morning and raining heavily when the *Avoca* berthed at Holyhead. Stiff and chilled, Paul stepped ashore and crossed the tracks to the railway station. There was scarcely time for him to swallow a cup of tea in the refreshment room before he caught the southbound train.

Toward four o'clock in the afternoon, the train drew into the small moorland station that was his destination. He meant to ask the porter to direct him to the prison, but somehow the words thickened on his tongue; he passed through the white wicket in

silence. However, once outside, he saw in the distance, across the rain-drenched earth, the great gray bulk of Stoneheath. He set off along the narrow road which wound across the moor.

At an incline on the path he leaned against a stunted birch tree to gain his breath. Now he could discern the details of the prison: a great blank windowless square, pierced by a low portcullis, with watchtowers hovering like eagles at each corner, stern as a medieval fort. An unscalable wall, with spikes on the coping, enclosed the whole domain, in which, like enormous wounds, three red stone quarries caught the eye. In one of these some prisoners were working, seen at that distance like gray ants, guarded by warders.

A sudden step behind him made him spin around. A shepherd had come up the hill, followed by a shaggy sheep dog.

"Not a pretty view," he remarked when he halted beside Paul.

"No." Paul spoke with an effort.

"It's a plague spot if ever there was one. Ay, even as we're talking here, a guard in that tower has a pair of field glasses leveled on us, watching every move we make."

Paul forced himself to ask the question uppermost in his mind.

"When do they have visiting days?"

"Visiting days." The crofter looked at him with open derision. "There are no such days in Stoneheath."

Paul felt his heart contract. "But . . . the prisoner's relatives?"

The other said briefly: "No, not ever."

He whistled to his dog and, with a nod, was gone.

Paul remained motionless, all his sanguine expectations dashed to the ground. He could not see his father . . . could not even speak one word with him . . . what he had come to do was impossible.

Something broke within his breast. Torn by grief, pain and frustration, he gave a wild inarticulate cry. Tears ran down his cheeks. He turned and made his way back blindly to the station.

CHAPTER 2

UPON the outskirts of the city of Wortley there stands Prusty's tobacco shop. This emporium has two windows, the one carrying a display of tobacco, the other an opaque blank—except for a small peephole showing the bench at which the proprietor makes by hand the cigarettes for which he is locally renowned.

Toward noon, on this June day, Mr. Prusty was, in fact, seated at his bench rolling out his special brand with a rapid and delicate touch. He was a skinny little man, past sixty, with a blunt porous nose and a choleric complexion, his straggling white mustache fumed with nicotine.

Perched on his stool, Mr. Prusty was watching a bareheaded young man who several times approached the shop, only to hesitate at the last moment and turn away. In the end, however, he seemed to muster all his will power. He crossed the street with a rush and came through the door. Mr. Prusty slowly got off his stool. "Yes?" he inquired brusquely.

"I'd like to see Mr. Albert Prusty."

The tobacconist smiled. "I am Albert Prusty."

The young man took a deep determined breath. "I am Paul Mathry." Once he had articulated that name a flood of relief suffused him. "Does the name convey anything to you?"

The cigarette maker's expression had not changed. He answered irritably: "I remember the Mathry case, if that's what you mean. But what the devil has it to do with you?"

"I am Rees Mathry's son."

Silence throbbed within the low-ceilinged shop.

"Why do you come to me?"

"I had to come." In broken phrases Paul made an effort to define the circumstances which had occasioned his trip to Stoneheath. He concluded: "I got in here this morning . . . there's a train out at nine this evening. I felt if only I could learn of something . . . perhaps some extenuating circumstance. I came to you . . . because you were the one favorable witness in all the case."

"What could I tell you?"

"I . . . I don't know." Paul sighed. He turned toward the door. "Well, I'll go now. Thank you for seeing me."

He was halfway out when a testy command drew him up short.

"Wait."

Paul came back slowly. Prusty stared him up and down.

"You're in a devil of a hurry," said the tobacconist. "You pop up from nowhere, and rush in and out as though you'd come for a box of matches. Damn it all! You can't expect me to go back fifteen years in fifteen minutes."

Before Paul could reply, the shop bell sounded and a customer

entered. The tobacconist addressed Paul in an undertone. "The lunch hour is my busy time. Not that I've anything to say, but you can come up to my flat around half past seven. Fifty-two Ushaw Terrace in Eldon. It's still there. And so am I."

He went back to his customer. Paul left the shop, and made his way to the local YMCA, where he had a hot bath and ate lunch.

It was now only two o'clock. Paul pondered how he should use the time remaining before his appointment with Prusty. Suddenly an idea entered his mind. He made an inquiry at the desk, and after a ten-minute walk he was in the public library. He sought out the newspaper reference section.

"Could you give me the name of the most reputable Wortley newspaper?"

The young man behind the desk looked up pertly. "Probably the *Courier* is the best. It's quite dependable."

"Thank you. Could I see the files for the last four months of 1921?"

"Will you complete a form, please?"

"Of course." Paul filled in the slip and an attendant brought out a heavy folio and placed it on a table.

Paul began to turn the dry, yellowish sheets. There it was:

DASTARDLY OUTRAGE AT ELDON YOUNG WOMAN BRUTALLY MURDERED

He controlled himself, and read steadily, with bent head, while the hands on the dome clock moved forward. In essence it was the story he had heard, but told with a more dramatic force. The speech of the Prosecutor, Matthew Sprott, cut him like a whip.

This atrocious murder, he read, was carried out by an abandoned ruffian in circumstances of savage ferocity which beggar description. The blackguard who committed this crime has sunk to the lowest depths of human degradation. Hanging, gentlemen of the jury, is far too good for him.

In a special supplement, at the end of the last sheet, he found a page of photographs: the Prosecutor; the victim—a pretty, simpering young woman, wearing a beribboned blouse; the witnesses; the informer, Rocca, weak-faced, with sleek hair plastered in a middle parting; the weapon—a German razor. And, in the center of the page between two police officers, the condemned man. His father's face, bearing a hunted, sunken look, like a cornered animal, filled Paul with anguish.

Quickly he closed the file of newspapers. "Guilty! Guilty!" he muttered to himself. "Beyond the shadow of a doubt!"

He glanced at the clock and saw, with dull surprise, that it was nearly seven o'clock. He rose and carried the file back to the desk. The librarian who had issued it to him was still on duty.

"Shall you want this again?" he inquired. "If so, we'll keep it out for you."

Paul noticed that the young fellow was looking at him with friendly interest and wondered a little shamefully if the librarian had witnessed his display of feeling.

"No, I shan't want it again."

He stood for a moment, as though expectant of a reply, but although the clerk's eyes remained upon him he did not speak. Paul turned and went out into the noisy streets.

He walked slowly; twilight was falling as he turned into Ushaw Terrace. It was a narrow thoroughfare with a tall row of stucco houses on either side. Paul could not restrain a shudder as he entered the actual house where the murder was done, but, setting his jaw, he mounted the damp-smelling stone staircase and rang the bell on the second landing.

Mr. Prusty admitted him to the untidy front parlor, where, on a small gas ring, a bubbling pot of coffee diffused a rich aroma. The little tobacconist wore carpet slippers, an old velvet smoking jacket and, as though to point up this costume, a somewhat battered fez. His manner was hospitable as he poured the coffee and offered his guest a cup.

Paul glanced about the room, furnished in worn red plush, and, caught by the ornate brass chandelier, his eyes finally came to rest upon the ceiling above his head.

"Yes," said Prusty, interpreting his expression. "I was in this very seat when the banging came through, such a fearful banging it made me rush up. I'll never forget the sight of her lying there, half naked." He broke off. "There's no one there now . . . it's empty. I have a key . . . the landlord has me keep one . . . if you'd like to see the room."

"No, no." Paul shook his head. "I've had as much as I can stand. All afternoon I went through the case in the *Courier*."

"Ah, yes," Prusty meditated. "It was well reported there. They were even fair to me. And I made a poor enough show. Sprott, the Prosecutor, made a regular fool of me. All because I would

not swear the man who came out of that flat was Rees Mathry."

"You did not recognize him?"

"It was dark in the hallway. I didn't have my glasses. Oh, I dare say I was wrong. . . . All the others were so positive. But I'm a stubborn man. I was not sure and I would not swear to it. Have you ever been in the witness box?"

"No."

"God, when they have you there, they tie you in knots. They won't let you say what you want to say. Now there was one strange thing I never got the chance to mention. I used to discuss it with Dr. Tuke—he was the doctor I called to see the body. Oh, he never figured in the case, they had their own medical experts, but he was interested and we often talked it over afterward."

The tobacconist reflectively stirred his coffee.

"When I went in the sitting room and saw that murder had been done, I rushed to the window. I wanted to catch another glimpse of the man that ran away. And I did. I saw him jump on a bicycle that stood against the railings and pedal off like mad. Now the color of that bicycle was green, bright-green . . . I'll swear to it. And have you ever seen a bright-green bicycle, wherever you've been in England?"

Paul shook his head, puzzled.

"Strange, eh?" Prusty paused significantly. "Especially when you consider that all his life Mathry had never even possessed one of the usual black bicycles." He waved a deprecating hand. "Of course they made out that he had simply lifted it to make a quick getaway. But if so, who owned that green bicycle, and where the devil did it vanish to? They never found it."

There was a heavy pause.

"Another thing," Prusty went on, deliberately. "That peculiar leather purse found beside the body. It was not the murdered woman's or Mathry's. Then whose was it? That was a point that bothered that fellow who had charge of the case. Swann."

"Swann," echoed Paul blankly.

"Detective Inspector James Swann." Instinctively the tobacconist glanced about him, as though fearful of being overheard. "I'm no humanitarian, I don't like to stick my neck out for anyone. But I do think you ought to know about Swann."

Paul sat up as Prusty resumed in a guarded tone.

"Swann was a nice chap. When any of the young lads got up

to mischief, he wouldn't run them in, he'd just talk to them. You see what I mean, he was regular decent. Unfortunately he had one weakness, the drink." Prusty shook his head. "It was strange, very strange. I knew Swann well, for he used to come to the shop. When the case was all over, I began to notice he was hitting the bottle harder. He seemed to have something on his mind. Then one day, it would be about a month later, he came in maybe just a little tight. 'I'm going to take a big step, Albert,' he says to me: 'I'm going to see Walter Gillett.'"

Prusty paused to sip his coffee. "Gillett was a first-class lawyer who did a lot of work about the police courts, and naturally I asked Swann why he was going to see him. 'I can't say anything now,' he answered. 'But maybe you'll hear all about it soon.'"

Again the tobacconist lifted his cup and sipped. Paul could barely contain himself.

"Well," Prusty continued, somberly, "the very next day, Swann turned up for duty stupid drunk. He gave the wrong traffic signals and caused a serious automobile accident—a woman was run over and nearly killed. He was tried, dismissed from the force, and sentenced to six months' hard labor."

Paul asked, "Then . . . what became of him?"

"He was finished," said Prusty. "When Swann came out he tried a number of jobs but he never stuck at anything. He went to pieces. I can't say how he is now for I've lost track of him."

"But why did all this happen?" asked Paul. "Had he gone to see Gillett?"

"Ah!" Prusty answered meaningly. "Ask me another."

He drained the last of his coffee, and spoke in a still lower voice.

"One night, after Swann came out of jail, he dropped into my shop. He'd been drinking for days, and he was pretty far gone. He said to me, 'Do you know what?' 'No, Jimmy,' I said, humoring him. 'Well,' he says, 'it's this. Don't ever try to tell tales out of school.' And he began to laugh and laugh; he staggered out of my shop laughing, and by God it wasn't a laugh you'd want to hear."

"What else did he say?" Paul cried out.

"Nothing . . . then or later . . . not another word. But right or wrong, I had the feeling in my bones that he'd come to this pass through the Mathry case."

There was a long stillness. Nothing was clear to Paul, yet he felt again that strange incitement, urging him forward.

"It's getting late." Prusty was gazing at the clock. "If you're not careful you'll miss your train."

Paul stood up to go. "I can't take the train tonight," he said. "I must find out what Swann and Gillett have to say."

PAUL AWOKE early next morning. When he had breakfasted he wrote a brief letter to his mother which he hoped would relieve her mind; then he set out for the center of the city. The tobacconist was ignorant of the present whereabouts of Swann and Gillett, but he had at least been able to furnish the number of the lawyer's office in Temple Lane, with an address near the Corn Market where Swann had resided some two years ago.

Paul reached 15 Temple Lane at half past nine and found a man in a green baize apron, who had just opened up the premises.

"Is this Mr. Walter Gillett's office?"

The janitor answered, "It was. He's left this address."

"You wouldn't know where he is now?"

The janitor summed up Paul with a sidelong glance. "Would it be worth as much as a bob to you?"

From his depleted supply of cash Paul paid over a shilling.

The janitor spun the coin expertly and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "He's in Orme Square, by the City Church. Go down to the end of Temple Lane, turn right. Look around and you'll see his name up. You can't miss it."

Paul found Orme Square without difficulty. It was, in fact, the City Churchyard, a pleasant old burying ground shaded by tall elms. At first Paul did not fully grasp the significance of the janitor's directions. Then it dawned on him—Gillett was in the churchyard, dead. He restrained an angry impulse to return and exact satisfaction from the man in the baize apron. With Gillett gone, now more than ever he must try at once to find James Swann. He spun round resolutely and walked rapidly away.

Presently he was knocking at the door of a basement house which stood in a row behind the Corn Market. A woman in a wrapper came out.

"I am looking for Mr. Swann . . . Mr. James Swann." Paul made an effort to keep his tone matter-of-fact.

"He had a room here for many a month, but he's gone these two years back," the woman said. "You wouldn't be seeking him for anything wrong?"

"Oh, quite the contrary," Paul said quickly. "Where did he go?"

"He went to a lodginghouse in Ware Street kept by a man called Hart."

Ware Street was not more than half a mile away, a long poor thoroughfare, lined with cheap shops and hucksters' barrows. By consulting the city directory in a branch post office, Paul succeeded in locating the Hart lodginghouse.

This was a brick tenement in a squalid court, approached by a narrow entrance. The bellpull had been torn from its socket, and there was no knocker on the dilapidated door. Paul rapped repeatedly with his knuckles on the blistered panels. Presently there appeared a boy of twelve with a dirty face and swollen neck glands wrapped up in a strip of red flannel.

"There's no one home," he announced in a husky voice, before Paul could speak. He explained that he was sick, had been kept home from school, and that all the men who lodged in the house were at work. He knew of no one by the name of Swann. His mother, who looked after the place, would be back at four o'clock. Paul told the boy that he would return.

It was now afternoon, and an impulse, which had been gathering within him since the previous night, drove Paul once again to the public library. The same clerk was on duty. He accepted in silence the slip that Paul handed him.

"The YMCA is my address now," Paul felt compelled to explain. "I'm staying for a few days."

The clerk nodded and pressed the bell for the attendant, who soon reappeared burdened with two heavy folios—bound copies of the *Courier* for the year 1922. Paul sat down at a table and opened up the first volume.

Diligently, running his finger down each column, he scrutinized every page. It was tedious work but he persisted. When he had completed his examination he sat back in his chair, frowning, rubbing his forehead with his hand. He rose to return the files.

"Did you find what you wanted?" The clerk made the inquiry sound like part of the regular routine. Yet, somehow, Paul sensed a lively curiosity in that simple question.

"No, I didn't." There was a pause. All at once Paul was swept up by a desire to confide in the young librarian. "I was looking for the report on the trial of a police inspector named Swann in the year 1922. I'm trying to locate him."

"Any idea of where to look?" The question came smartly.

"He's probably still in the neighborhood. By all accounts he's down and out."

"I see."

Paul thanked him in a few awkward words, and went out. He walked in the direction of Ware Street, and at five o'clock reached the Hart lodginghouse. The landlady had returned. She was a stout woman with a checked shawl across her shoulders.

"Yes," she admitted. "I remember Swann, well enough. Down on his luck, he was. Too much lifting of the elbow, if you follow me. I wasn't sorry when he left."

"Did he leave you his address?"

"Wait a minute, let me think. The question is, did I write it down." She turned to the boy who stood listening in the back hall. "Fetch me the book, Josey."

The boy brought her a dog-eared ledger. Moistening her forefinger, she began to flick over the pages.

"Ah, what's this, now?"

Paul peered at the place she indicated. There it was: *James Swann, c/o Roberts, 15 Castle Road, Bromlea.*

Quickly, he copied it in his notebook, thanked the woman and made his escape. It was too late to go to Bromlea tonight. But he would go tomorrow.

ON THE following evening, Paul was again on his way back to the YMCA. All his high hopes were gone. He had combed Bromlea from end to end, and all without the least avail. Swann was gone, vanished without trace.

Despondently, Paul entered the hotel and slowly climbed the stairs to his room. He noticed a telegram on the mantel. He tore it open and read: DREADFULLY ANXIOUS RETURN AT ONCE SUMMER SCHOOL APPOINTMENT AWAITING YOU LOVE FROM ALL MOTHER.

Crouching before a tiny fire in his room, he reread the message. Apparently his mother had spoken to Professor Slade, and in his present mood he wondered if he should not return to the summer-school position. The phrase "love from all" made him smile, so patently did it include the affection of a forgiving Ella.

When he had warmed up he went downstairs. In the lobby, he saw the doorboy coming toward him.

"There's a young fellow to see you in the visitors' room."

Surprised, Paul followed the boy to the musty little lounge, where he found the clerk from the library. Detached from his official position, the young librarian had an ingratiating frankness that was disarming.

"I've something to say to you." His glance briskly swept the empty room. "I suppose we can talk here without being overheard. My name's Boulia . . . Mark Boulia."

He held out his hand, Paul gripped it, then sat down. Mark studied him quizzically before he resumed.

"That first day at the library I watched you—I couldn't help it, you were so obviously . . . in difficulties. I felt sorry for you, and friendly, too. You know how it is, you take to a person at first sight. Afterward I went through the file. I know who you are."

This Paul had surmised. He kept silent.

"Yesterday you were looking for some further references. You didn't trace them. But when you had gone, I did. In one paper, a small one, I found a comment on the Swann trial. It was a protest against the harshness of Swann's sentence."

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because I have found Swann."

Paul stared at him unbelievably.

"It wasn't too difficult . . . after what you told me. I simply checked the relief lists and registers of all the city hospitals. Swann is in Belvedere Infirmary."

SWANN LAY in the bare and dismal pauper ward of the infirmary. His bed was completely screened off; on the floor there lay an oxygen cylinder equipped with a long inhaler. Swann's frame showed that he had been a big man, but now he was much emaciated. His shallow, listless breathing barely disturbed the contour of his ribs.

It was the afternoon visiting hour and, beside the bed, Paul stood with Mark Boulia. Paul had made an impassioned plea; and now he waited tensely for Swann to speak.

Swann did not hurry; he had his own thoughts. But presently he let his eyes fall on Paul and said, "You're like him."

He was silent for a long time before resuming in a spent voice: "It's queer I should see you now. After what happened to me I swore I'd keep my mouth shut. But you're Mathry's son. And I'm done for anyway. So here goes."



A short pause—Swann seemed to be looking deep into the past.

"When I was assigned to that case I was keen as mustard and I remember like it was yesterday when the big clue came in. A bookie's tout named Rocca turned up at headquarters in such a state of panic he could scarcely talk. He'd been friendly with the murdered woman over a period of twelve months, but he'd had nothing to do with the murder—he couldn't have—because on September eighth and ninth he'd been out of town at the races, and he had a dozen witnesses to prove it.

"Well, this didn't help us much, but we thought we'd detain Rocca anyhow. When he heard that he was to be held, he really spilled the beans. He told us about his pal, Rees Mathry, and about Mathry's attempt to fake an alibi. We got on the trail at once and Rees Mathry was picked up."

Swann paused, moistened his lips.

"Unfortunately for him, Mathry made the mistake of striking an officer. Add the fact that he was taken in the very act of leaving for South America and you had a very damning situation. And straightaway he made it worse. At his preliminary examination

the first question asked of him was: 'Where were you between eight and nine on the evening of September eighth?' Not knowing that his friend had given him away, Mathry answered: 'Playing billiards with a man named Rocca.' That seemed to put the clincher on it."

Swann let his head fall back.

"I must tell you about my boss, the Superintendent—now he's the head of the Wortley police, Chief Constable Adam Dale. He'd worked his way up from the bottom, a first-rate officer, and he never took a bribe in his life. He loved his work and used to boast to me that he could spot a criminal a mile away. And from the beginning, he'd spotted Mathry.

"Although the evidence seemed so conclusive, I pointed out that Mathry had booked the tickets to South America in his own name, that he had likewise engaged hotel rooms for himself and his family quite openly, a thing inconceivable in the case of a man who wished to cover up his traces. Besides, Mathry impressed me favorably. He made no attempt to deny that he knew Spurling, acknowledged he had sketched and sent her the post card. He maintained he was out only for a bit of mild amusement. I put all this up to the Chief, but he was convinced—and quite honestly, mind you—that he had the right man."

Swann rested for a moment before resuming.

"The official mind works in regular channels—nobody knows that better than me. Dale *wanted* to find a weapon among Mathry's belongings accountable for the victim's injuries. He *wanted* to discover bloodstains upon Mathry's suit. He *wanted* witnesses who could identify Mathry.

"Almost at once, in one of Mathry's trunks, the Chief Constable found his weapon: a razor, slightly rusty from disuse. Mathry freely admitted it had been in his possession for years—he had inherited it from his father. Now, if Mathry had used this blade to do the deed was it likely that he would have carefully preserved it for us to find? No, the first action of a murderer is to rid himself of the weapon. Yet Dale was near jumping with pride and satisfaction when he showed the razor to me.

"It was sent to the experts to be examined for bloodstains, along with Mathry's clothing. Meanwhile, the examination of the witnesses was proceeding—Mr. Prusty, Edward Collins and Louisa Burt. Prusty and Collins seemed reluctant to testify. How-

ever, the witness Burt was quite a different character. This young girl, on a dark night, in a street with hardly any lights, got one second's glimpse of the criminal. Yet she supplied the most exact details of his appearance.

"'A man about thirty-five,' said she. 'Tall, thin and dark, with pale features, straight nose, clean-shaven. He wore a checked cap, a drab-colored raincoat and brown shoes.'

"At first Dale was pleased to get a description. However, Mathry turned out to be neither tall, dark nor even clean-shaven, but of medium size, fair, with a brown mustache. Also, his clothing was quite different. However, Burt was equal to the occasion. Quite calmly she shelved the big, clean-shaven character in favor of a shorter man with a mustache. And Collins, who immediately after the event had told me he would not be able positively to identify the man, now came into line with Burt.

"The next step was to take them to view the prisoner. Eleven policemen in plain clothes were lined up in a room with Mathry. The two witnesses were positive in their identification. Mathry was removed to Wortley, formally charged with the murder."

The sick man turned weakly on his side and gazed directly at Paul. "I still couldn't think that his number was up, but I hadn't bargained on the counsel for the prosecution. It was Matthew Sprott who really did the trick. He's now Sir Matthew, but then he was unknown, and desperately anxious to succeed. The minute I heard him I saw that he meant to hang Mathry.

"Well, the prosecution called all its experts. They didn't call Dr. Tuke, the doctor who had first seen the body. They had, besides Dobson, the police surgeon, a professor who testified that the razor could have caused the injuries which had proved fatal to the victim. He was not prepared to swear that there were bloodstains upon the weapon or on the prisoner's coat, but he had found traces of what might have been mammalian corpuscles. Next came the handwriting expert who swore that the note found in the victim's flat was written by Mathry 'in a disguised left hand.' When Collins and Burt went into the box they surpassed themselves. Burt, especially, with her young innocent face and big earnest eyes, made a tremendous impression on the jury.

"Then came the speech for the Crown. For three hours Sprott let himself go without a single written note. I tell you it was masterly. The jury hung on every word. The speech by prisoner's

counsel was useless: he was an oldish man with a thin voice and he seemed quite unaware of evidence favorable to Mathry.

"It was soon over. Guilty. The prisoner's protests of innocence went through me like a knife. But he was dragged away and the five hundred pounds reward was paid out to Collins and Burt."

The sick man's strength seemed to fail. In an exhausted voice he said: "Come again in a day or so. You'll hear the rest then."

Silently Paul rose, pressed the sick man's hand between his own, then followed Mark Boulia through the door.

CHAPTER 3

COULD IT BE that an innocent man had been buried alive for fifteen years? Swann had offered no concrete proof, only an attitude of mind. Yet the mere possibility drove Paul frantic. But he realized that now, above all, he must be calm and practical.

His first step was to write his mother asking for a parcel of fresh clothing, his next to find a permanent lodging. He discovered a cheap attic in Poole Street; the advance payment on it almost exhausted his money. When he had washed, he set out to find some means of supporting himself.

Wortley was a humming city, but its industries were highly specialized, mainly china, cutlery, and leather goods—trades demanding a technical skill which Paul did not possess; nor was he yet fully qualified as a teacher. When two days had gone by without result, he scanned the "situations vacant" columns of the newspaper with increasing anxiety.

But on the following morning a stroke of real luck came his way. As he walked along Ware Street he observed, pasted on the window of a large store known as The Bonanza Bazaar, a notice: **PIANIST WANTED. Apply Mr. Victor Harris, Manager, within.**

After a moment's hesitation, Paul entered the shop, a sort of five-and-ten-cent store, and was directed to Mr. Harris, a man wearing a flowered tie and striped double-breasted suit. When Paul told him he wished to apply for the job, the manager led him briskly to a section of the store where an upright piano stood among a display of sheet music. Taking a piece at random, he placed it on the instrument and said briefly: "Play!"

Paul sat down and ran his fingers over the keys. He could read

perfectly at sight. He played the piece through, repeated it with some variations of his own; then, picking up several other sheets, he played these over, too. Before he had finished, Mr. Harris was beating time approvingly on the counter with his rhinestone ring.

He nodded his decision. "You're hired. Three pounds a week and a sandwich lunch. Only see you keep going. No slacking or you're out on your ear. And use the loud pedal. Make the customers buy."

Paul kept on playing all day. He began freshly enough, but as the hours wore on his muscles ached from sitting on the hard piano stool. His mind, too, was in a turmoil, torn by thoughts of his father, by half-formed plans and projects.

Toward one o'clock Harris swaggered out for lunch and, after a few minutes, the girl in charge of the cafeteria brought over coffee and a plate of sandwiches to Paul. With a smile he asked her name. She told him, flatly, Lena Andersen, and moved off immediately. There was nothing uncivil in this, yet Paul sensed a constraint which stirred his curiosity.

She could not have been more than twenty years of age—tall, with blond hair and long limbs. Her features were regular and attractive but in repose her face was unusually sad. Paul was drawn toward her. He noticed that, although she appeared on good terms with the other assistants, she kept herself apart. What sort of person was she?

The afternoon dragged on. He closed his eyes while his fingers hammered on the keyboard. Six o'clock came at last and, hurrying from the store, he made his way directly to the infirmary. Swann seemed worse, and was disinclined to talk. But, as Paul sat patiently by his bedside, he gradually relented. He gazed at the young man with a kind of pity.

"I warn you . . . if you go on with this it'll change your whole life . . . as it did mine. And once you've put your hand to it, there'll be no turning back. How do you propose to begin?"

"I thought if I typed out a statement and you signed it, I could take it to the authorities. . . ."

Swann could not laugh—but a sardonic grimace passed across his pale lips. "What authorities? The police? They're already fully informed—and quite satisfied. The Public Prosecutor, Sir Matthew Sprott? I advise you not to meddle with him. No. The Secretary of State, in Parliament, alone has the power to open up the matter

and you wouldn't get within a mile of him with your present evidence. They'd simply laugh at you."

"But you believe my father is innocent."

"I know he's innocent," Swann answered. "In his summing up the judge called the murder a vile, monstrous crime, for which the extreme penalty was too light a punishment. And yet they reprieved Mathry. Why, I ask you, why? Maybe they weren't quite sure that the man they'd convicted was guilty and so they didn't swing him. They gave him slow death—life imprisonment—instead."

The sick man struggled to regain his breath.

"No," Swann said presently. "There is only one way to force them to reopen the case. *You must discover the real murderer.*"

Hitherto Paul had considered only his father's innocence; the thought of the actual assassin had scarcely entered his head. A new and formidable shadow had fallen across his path.

"What about Rocca?" he ventured, after a prolonged silence.

Swann shook his head contemptuously.

"He hadn't the guts. He only wanted to save his own skin. But speaking of skin," the sick man said, "we come back to the purse that was found by the body. Believe it or not, it was made of the finest leather in the world . . . tanned human hide. So you see," Swann resumed in that same vein of bitter satire, "you've only to lay your hands on a character perverted enough to possess such an article, link him up with a few other pieces of evidence that got mislaid—and you have the killer." Again that sardonic facial tremor. "After fifteen years . . . it should be relatively easy."

"Don't!" Paul said. "For God's sake."

Swann's expression changed. "Well, if you must . . . let me tell you more about the two main witnesses, Edward Collins and Louisa Burt.

"When they came to headquarters to claim the five hundred pounds reward I was on duty. Now, as I've told you, I had my serious doubts about this pair. I put them in a side room to wait. I was next door and, because of an acoustic arrangement we had, able to hear everything they said. I wrote it down, too. Collins, who sounded scared, said: 'Will we get the reward?' 'We'll get it, Ed, don't worry,' Burt answered, cool as you please, and she added: 'We might do even better.' 'What do you mean?' he said. She laughed. 'I've got something up my sleeve.'

"That seemed to bother Collins. He said: 'Mathry was the man, wasn't he, Louisa?' 'Shut up, will you,' she came back at him. 'It's too late to back down now. Don't you understand, you fool, it don't pay to go against the police. Besides, things may come out of this better than you ever dreamed,' she went on in a kind of faraway voice. 'I'll live like a lady yet before I'm through.' "

Swann paused. When he resumed he looked straight at Paul.

"I'd heard enough to confirm my worst suspicions. Burt, out of her own mouth, had given the show away. She had seen the murderer and come out with his description. When this didn't quite fit Mathry, she obligingly shifted her position. She wanted to stand well with the authorities, to be the little prima donna, right in the front of the picture, and of course to get the reward. It was her influence that swung Collins. And then, when it was all over, headlines, publicity, praise, she began to wonder about all the things that hadn't come out at the trial and to ask herself if, after all, it wasn't somebody else she had seen, a vaguely familiar figure, that she'd noticed around Eldon on her way to and from the laundry. Suddenly it came to her . . . a possibility of who this man might be . . . a chance . . . and with it a sense of golden opportunity.

"I ought to have gone to the Chief, but I didn't . . . I'd badgered him too much in the early stages of the case and we weren't on the best of terms. In the end, I went to a lawyer named Walter Gillett. He told me to keep clear of the whole business. He said: 'Jimmy, for God's sake, don't bring a hornet's nest about your ears.' By this time, I was in such a state of tension and confusion, I went on a blind, came on duty soused and . . . you know the rest."

Swann made a gesture that indicated there was nothing more he wished to say.

Paul broke the silence.

"Are they still here . . . Burt and Collins?"

"You'll never get hold of Collins—he married years ago and emigrated to New Zealand. But Burt is still here, and she is the key to the whole enigma." Swann paused. "There's just one chance in a million you might get something out of her."

"Where can I find her?" Paul exclaimed.

"She works for a highly respected family . . . another proof of how she can gull decent people."

From beneath his pillow Swann took a scrap of paper on which an address was written. He handed it to Paul.

"There!" he said, in a flat voice. "Now let me be. I feel damned bad and want to get some sleep."

Paul got to his feet. His voice was charged with feeling.

"Thank you," he said. "I'll come again soon."

He swung round and left the ward.

ON THE following evening, after work, Paul met Mark Boulia by appointment outside the Bonanza. "So we're making a start tonight!" Boulia broke out excitedly, as they moved off along the thronged pavement. "I've hardly been able to wait since I phoned you. What is this you found out about Burt?"

Paul was silent. Boulia's mercurial temperament, his tendency to treat the matter lightheartedly, as a thrilling adventure, made him question the wisdom of having asked him to accompany him. Yet he remembered the generous help Mark had given him, so after a moment he answered: "Burt is employed as a domestic servant. This is her evening off. I've a fair idea what she looks like and where to find her."

"Good work," Mark exclaimed, and added, "How did you leave Swann?"

Paul shook his head, glancing at him sideways. Boulia lost his effusiveness. "Worse?" he murmured.

"I called at the hospital at lunchtime. He was too ill to see me."

They walked in silence to Porlock Hill, one of the best sections of the city, and on to an adjoining cramped little colony of back streets and cobbled alleys, with a number of small shops and one public house: the Royal Oak.

"That's it," Paul said. Inside the tavern, he led the way to a table and, having ordered two glasses of ale, surveyed the room.

He turned to Mark. "Not here yet."

He had no sooner spoken than the swinging doors opened again and a woman entered and walked, with the air of a habitué, to a corner booth. Paul guessed at once that it was Louisa Burt. She was rather heavy about the hips and bust and wore a cheap plaid suit with yellow gloves and a fancy handbag.

She settled herself, ordered a small gin and, after fussing with the contents of her handbag, explored the saloon with her eyes. Paul, meeting her gaze, smiled slightly. She immediately turned away, as if insulted, but two minutes later she was again looking in their direction. This time Paul rose and crossed over to her

booth. With the correct note of ingratiating politeness, he said: "Good evening."

There was a pause. "Are you addressing me?"

"Yes. If you're alone, perhaps we might join you."

"I'm not alone, not really. I'm waiting on a friend. Of course, he might be detained, working late. He's a very important man."

"His loss will be our gain. Have a drink?"

"I'm not in the habit. Still—if you insist."

Paul signaled to Mark, who came over to the booth carrying Paul's tumbler and his own. "May I introduce my companion?"

"Pleased to meet you, I am sure. I forgot my visiting cards but my name is Miss Burt."

As they sat down she arranged her skirt in a ladylike manner; then, crooking her little finger, she emptied her glass.

"Now it's my treat, Miss Burt," Mark said. "What will you have?"

"Well, nothing was further from my thoughts. Gin."

Her eyes kept moving over them in shallow yet appraising inquiry. Her face was thickly powdered and her plump childish cheeks, indrawn at the corners of the mouth, gave her thick moist lips a strange sort of smirk. She had practically no forehead.

"Well, here's luck," Paul exclaimed, when her drink arrived.

"You know," Mark went on, "there's nothing beats a nice convivial evening. Among friends, you understand."

"I got to be back at nine," she said warningly. "I couldn't walk out nowhere tonight."

"Ah, well," Paul said easily. "We'll have better luck next time. We'll be properly acquainted then."

"You are perfect gentlemen, I must say. Some does rush you, something cruel."

Keenly alert, Paul kept the conversation flowing, playing on Burt's vanity, accepting with admiration her explanation that she was "lady housekeeper" in charge of a mansion on Porlock Hill.

After several drinks a flood of self-pity welled into her glassy eyes. "It's nice to meet two perfect gents. Not like some I could mention, only I wouldn't, being a perfect lady myself. I was brought up very strict, you understand, educated by the nuns in a French convent. Oh, it was lovely there. Of course, me being half French myself made a difference, they all knew what I would have been if only I'd had my rights, and p'r'aps they guessed the terrible

time what was in store for me." She broke off, searching their faces humbly. "Does that surprise you?"

Paul shook his head gravely, thinking at the same time, *Dear God, what a natural-born liar!*

"If you only knew." She clutched at Paul's arm. "What I've went through! Oh, if only I'd had my chance."

"And didn't you?" Mark prompted, sympathetically.

"Something happened. I only done right, mind you. And what did I get for it? A few pounds what went in six months. I only wanted to be recognized proper . . . have my place."

Paul had the wit to keep silent but Mark, in his excitement, leaned forward. "Why don't you tell us about it?" he pressed. "Perhaps we could help you."

There was a sharp pause. Burt suddenly seemed to recollect herself. "I got to go now," she said.

Masking his chagrin, Paul paid for the drinks, and escorted her through the swinging doors followed by Mark.

"Perhaps we could see you home?"

"Well . . . only to the gate, mind you."

They left the cobbled alley and set out along the deserted suburban road, Burt between Boulia and Paul. More than ever Paul exerted himself to please. Presently they reached a broad avenue, and opposite the end house Burt drew up.

"What a lovely mansion," Paul said.

"Yes." Burt was flattered. "I'm with the Oswalds . . . most refined people."

"Well, naturally." Paul spoke persuasively. "May we see you next Wednesday?"

Burt hesitated, but only for a moment. "All right," she said. "Same time, at the Oak."

Paul removed his hat, and with great politeness held out his hand. As he did so, the front door of the villa opened and an elderly gentleman came out, carrying a few letters, evidently making for the postbox at the end of the road. He noticed Burt and, in a pleasant voice, remarked: "Good evening, Louisa."

"Good evening, sir," she answered, in a humble voice. The change of tone to respectful servility was almost comic.

When he had gone, Burt, in some discomfiture, took leave of her two companions. As Paul and Boulia turned away they heard the slam of the back door.

CHAPTER 4

THE NEXT day, at the store, Paul was strained and preoccupied. When Lena Andersen brought him his luncheon he ate without his usual appetite. Perhaps she noticed this for she remarked: "Don't you like the ham?"

He came out of his abstraction, glanced up, and forced a smile.

"I do. I just don't happen to be hungry today." He added: "You're much too good to me. I know Harris said I could have a snack. But you bring me a regular spread."

"It's not a proper lunch. Sandwiches aren't too good for anyone."

He did not contradict her. He was pleased by the way in which she stood and talked with him. It was as though each had sensed the other's loneliness.

"You live by yourself, I suppose."

"Yes," he agreed. "And you?"

"Oh, no. I'm very lucky. I have two rooms in a friend's house in Ware Place."

"That's quite an establishment."

She nodded simply, looking away. "I can do it. I work hard, you see. Often I go out and work in the evenings at public banquets. It's good pay."

"Don't you ever go dancing, or to the movies, like the others?"

"No." She shrugged her shoulders. "I don't bother about that."

She stood, gazing ahead absently, then she took his empty cup and with a faint half-smile went back to the cafeteria.

Lena's conversation with Paul had not passed unnoticed by some of the sharp-eyed waitresses and when she returned to her counter one of the younger girls, named Nancy Wilson, nudged her neighbor. "D'you see that?" She made a sly movement of her head. "Miss Andersen had a long music lesson today."

"Doh, ray, me!" sang out a second girl.

"Oh, Lena!" another called over, with a broad smile. "Was you arranging to have your piano tuned?"

A general titter of laughter went up. Nancy attempted to cap the joke. "Careful, Lena," she called. "Once bitten, twice shy."

There was an uncomfortable silence. The girls suddenly

became busy again and several gave Nancy a quick angry glance. Lena, who gave no sign of having heard, picked up her charge list and began to add up the figures.

Paul wondered what was being said, but the incident soon passed from his mind. He was unable to concentrate upon anything but his next meeting with Burt.

At last Wednesday arrived and somehow Paul managed to get through the day. He had arranged to meet Mark outside the Bonanza at seven o'clock, and at closing time he was among the first to leave.

But at half past seven there was still no sign of Mark. Paul could wait no longer and started off at a fast pace toward the library. In ten minutes he was there and saw that Mark was still on duty. Hurrying to the desk, he exclaimed: "What's the matter? Aren't you coming?"

Boulia had flinched perceptibly at the sight of Paul. He spoke in a hurried undertone. "I'm sorry to let you down, Paul, but the truth is . . . I'll have to drop out of our arrangement." Mark's voice fell to a still lower key. "Take my advice and drop it, too. I can't say more, but I was never more serious in my life."

A strained silence followed.

"At least I'll see you again?" Paul said slowly.

Mark shook his head. "I'm taking a job outside the city."

Paul drew in a slow, comprehending breath. Now even Mark's coöperation was gone. He was alone. He held out his hand and said simply: "I'm sorry if I've got you in a mess. Thank you for all you've done and good luck. I hope we'll meet again."

He turned sharply and went out of the library to the nearest telephone booth.

"This is the Royal Oak Inn. Jack speaking," said a voice in answer to his call.

"Is Miss Burt there?"

"I'm sorry," the voice came back, "Miss Burt isn't here. She came in as usual and left around eight."

Paul reflected for a moment, then left the booth. In the Square he took a tram direct to Porlock Hill. His watch showed half past eight when he arrived at the end house in the avenue.

Paul opened the gate and then, nerving himself, he walked round by the service entrance and knocked on the back door, which was opened by a woman in a housekeeper's black dress.

"Could I see Miss Louisa Burt, please?"

The woman looked Paul up and down.

"She's gone to her room with a headache."

"Couldn't she come down for a minute?"

"I'm sorry." The housekeeper shook her head and closed the door. Discouraged, Paul nevertheless told himself he was not beaten. He must see Burt at all costs.

He retraced his steps to the front of the house. Here, through a large window he made out the man whom he had already seen walking to the mailbox, a woman who seemed to be his wife, and another couple in the sedately furnished drawing room. He saw that a bridge table was set out. It would be late before they finished and Louisa came in to clear up. He resigned himself to a lengthy wait.

Suddenly, in the shadows, he heard a heavy step. He swung round and found himself confronted by a policeman.

"What are you up to?"

At these words an icy wave rushed over Paul.



"I wanted to see someone in the house."

"Is that how you make a call—hiding among the bushes? You'd better come quiet."

There was nothing for it but to submit. Paul set off beside the policeman in silence.

It was a long march back to the center of the city. Significantly, Paul realized that he was not being taken to a local station. At last they passed through an archway and entered the Wortley Police Headquarters.

"Well, now, what's all this about?" asked the sergeant, whose name, conspicuously stamped on the charge sheet, was Jupp.

In routine, almost perfunctory fashion, Jupp took down the particulars offered him by his subordinate, glancing at Paul queerly from time to time. Finally, he pointed his pen toward a bench.

"I've an idea the Chief would like to see you. Sit there."

Paul did as he was bid. By this time he was convinced that he had not been picked up by accident.

At last he received a signal from Sergeant Jupp. He followed him down a passage to a comfortable office, furnished with leather armchairs and a wide mahogany desk. Paul's attention was riveted upon the man who sat behind it. He recognized him at once from the photograph he had seen in the library: the Chief Constable of Wortley, Adam Dale.

"Sit down, my boy."

The quiet voice, warm with unforeseen friendliness, came to Paul as a shock; he sank into the easy chair before the desk.

The Chief Constable was now a man of fifty-five. He had an enormous frame, all bone and solid muscle, the features carved in granite, the eyes gray as ice.

"I've wanted to see you for some days now, lad," Dale resumed, "and this seemed as good an opportunity as any."

Paul braced himself in his chair.

"First of all, I want you to understand that I know who you are and all about you. Just after your arrival I had a telegram from Belfast, sent by your good friends there, asking us to keep you out of harm. I know all that you've been doing."

The Chief Constable picked up an ebonite ruler and turned it thoughtfully in his tremendous hands.

"Now look here, lad . . . I've a fair idea of how you feel toward me. I'm the brute who sent your father up for life. That's your

side of the case. Well, let me tell you mine. It's this. I only did my duty. It's my job to prosecute wrongdoers and protect the right."

Dale paused and pointed the ruler at Paul. "If you set yourself up against the forces of law and order you'll wind up in trouble. See where's it's got you already. You're found hanging around a big house after dark. Mind you, I bring no charges. I'm just trying to show you where this sort of mischief is likely to end."

Paul sat silent. At first he had meant to argue his side of the case. But some secret foresight held him back.

"It's not my place to give you advice." Dale's tone was reasonable. "But take my tip and go home. I'd hate to see you get hurt."

He made a gesture of dismissal, cordial rather than curt. Without a word, Paul rose and emerged into the cool night air, free. The Chief Constable's outspoken candor had shaken him. There was no mistaking the other's honesty. Yet the very nature of Dale's demand, and the circumstances which had preceded it, awoke in him a hot defiance, a longing for a stronger course of action which for some days had been developing in his mind.

His need of advice upon this matter was immediate, and despite the lateness of the hour he thought, a trifle desperately: "I must see Swann . . . at once. If I'm to be blocked here I must take a more direct approach. After all, it was he who told me I would get redress only at the highest levels."

Striding through the streets, he soon reached the infirmary. But there the aged porter at the entrance mildly shook his head. "I'm sorry, lad. He's off the list for good. He passed away this afternoon."

Later that evening, after prolonged reflection, Paul made his decision. He wrote and mailed a letter to Westminster, in London.

THE Liberal Member of Parliament for Wortley enjoyed his brief visits to his constituency, especially in November, when the partridge shooting was at its best. George Birley came of local country stock and his success in London had not dulled his affection for his old friends and his favorite sport. He was a popular figure in Wortley and, at fifty, ruddy, clean-shaven, genial, a great hand at a story, fine judge of a cigar, he had become a kind of symbol of native worth unspoiled by success.

True, his career in Parliament had not been especially noteworthy. There were some who said that a good fellow was not necessarily a good statesman, that were it not for his noble wife,

Lady Ursula Ancaster, and her highly placed connections, George might not have had his place in governing the nation.

On this particular morning Birley was in excellent humor. In the suite they always kept for him at the Queen's Hotel, he was at toast and marmalade and his third cup of coffee. In an hour he would be snuffing the rich earth of his boyhood with three good companions and his new cocker, just broken to the gun.

A waiter entered. "There's a young man asking for you, sir."

Birley looked up from his paper and frowned.

"I can't possibly see him. I'm going out in ten minutes."

"He says he has an appointment, sir. He gave me this letter."

Birley took the letter which the waiter handed him—his own letter, with the House of Commons heading. What a nuisance! He had sent this days ago, in response to a rather vague communication, then forgotten all about it. Still, he was a man who prided himself on never going back on his word.

"All right," he said. "Bring him up."

A moment later Paul was shown in. Birley motioned him to a chair at the table. "Well!" he exclaimed heartily. "I've been expecting you ever since you wrote. Will you have a cup of coffee?"

"No, thank you, sir."

"Let's come to the point then, young man," Birley said. "I'm rather pressed, you know. Have an important conference."

"I guessed you mightn't have much time, sir, so I prepared a typewritten statement of the facts."

"Good, good!" Birley approved blandly. "Tell me in a few words what it's about."

Paul moistened his lips, took a swift deep breath. His recital lasted exactly seven minutes, and when it was over Birley sat like a man caught in a most unpleasant trap. He cleared his throat.

"I can't believe this is true. It sounds like a complete cock-and-bull yarn to me."

He rose and strode up and down the room, furious at the blight put upon his day. He couldn't stick his head into such a hornet's nest. No man in his senses would touch it with a barge pole. And yet he experienced an uneasy qualm. With a fretful glance at the clock, he temporized. "All right, then. Leave me that damn statement of yours. Come and see me again this evening at seven."

Paul handed over the document with an expression of thanks, then quietly left the room. As he hurried toward the Bonanza

he was hopeful that he had made some impression on Birley.

The day passed with intolerable slowness. Paul was at the Queen's at quarter past seven and, after a short wait, was shown upstairs. But on this occasion there was no affability in Birley's manner. By way of greeting he barely nodded. Then he favored the young man with a long, unsociable scrutiny. Finally he spoke.

"I've gone through that paper of yours. I must say you've put it together very cleverly. But there are always two sides to a case. And you've stated only one of them."

"Only one of them can be true," Paul countered quickly.

Birley frowned and shook his head. "Things like that simply don't happen. Haven't we the best system of legal justice in the world? What could be fairer than trial by jury? Good Lord! It's been going on for over seven hundred years!"

"That might be an argument against it," Paul answered in a low voice. "I've thought about this a great deal, sir. This legal system, the best in the world, first convicts a man of murder and condemns him to hang; then, when it questions its own judgment, it reverses itself, and sends him to a living hell in prison for the rest of his life. Is that justice?" Paul rose to his feet, his eyes blazing. "That's what happened to my father. He's in Stoneheath because of a system of criminal procedure which relies on circumstantial evidence, on witnesses who are unfit to testify, on manipulation of facts by the prosecution, on 'experts' who are no more than paid yes men for the Crown, and on a Public Prosecutor whose purpose is less to secure justice than to hang the prisoner in the dock." Ignoring Birley, and swept away by his obsessions, Paul went on.

"You're my representative in Parliament. Even if you don't believe the statement I gave you, it's your duty to see that it gets a proper hearing. If you don't, I'll go out myself and shout it in the public square."

Suddenly realizing what he was saying, Paul stopped short. His legs turned weak and he sat down, covering his eyes with his hand. He felt that he had utterly destroyed his chance of success.

But he was wrong. Birley admired courage and often took a liking to those who "could speak up to him." He had begun to feel, also, that there might be something untoward about this case.

He took a few paces up and down the carpet. Then he said: "In spite of all the words you've thrown at me, I do stand for fair play. I don't like this business of yours one little bit. But, by

heaven, I won't fight shy of it on that account. I'll bring it to the floor of the House of Commons. Yes, by the Almighty, I'll land it right in the lap of the Secretary of State himself."

Paul raised his eyes. So unexpected, so staggering was this victory that he felt the room spin dizzily about him. Blindly he accepted the hand which Birley held out to him, and a few minutes later was in the street, with a wild singing in his heart.

THE WORTLEY *Courier* reported verbatim the proceedings in the House of Commons. Although he knew there could be no immediate result of Birley's efforts, Paul read it eagerly every evening.

Buoyed by hope, he now cheerfully made the best of his present circumstances. At his lodgings he widened his nodding acquaintance with the only other boarder of his own age—James Crocket, an accountant's clerk. Crocket, a rather stodgy character, was caution itself in returning Paul's friendly overtures, but one Saturday morning he speculatively produced two Sunday tickets to the Botanical Gardens from his pocketbook.

"Would you care to have these? It's very nice. The public isn't admitted Sundays—I got these from the Society."

Unwilling to hurt Crocket's feelings, Paul accepted the tickets with a word of thanks and dashed off to the store. In his change of mood he found himself playing without boredom. From time to time he gazed at Lena Andersen across the aisles. Her earlier reticence seemed to have returned and this withdrawal from the friendship he offered hurt him. At lunchtime one day—it was Saturday—a sudden impulse took hold of him.

"Lena," he said lightly, "why don't you and I take a small outing tomorrow afternoon? I have two tickets for the Botanical Gardens. It won't be wildly exciting, but it might break the monotony of our young lives."

"It's very kind of you," she said, with her head averted. "I don't often go out. . . ."

He could not understand her confusion, so completely out of proportion to his casual invitation. "Think it over," he said.

Lena went slowly back to her counter, strangely excited. Since coming to Wortley, she had not accepted the slightest attentions from any man. There had been difficulties, of course. The manager, Harris, for instance, had pestered her, but her rigid indifference had gradually shaken him off. Then, not infrequently, she

was accosted and followed in the streets—occasions which caused a sickening revival of her secret dread.

And yet, as the afternoon wore on, she told herself that there could be no great harm in accepting Paul's invitation. She must not carry to excess a resolution taken under great stress and anguish of mind. When business slackened and she had an opportunity, she crossed the store and told him she would be glad to go.

Thus, after lunch on the following day, which was fine and sunny, Paul found himself strolling along Ware Place. As he reached No. 61, the door opened and Lena, wearing a dark Sunday suit and hat, came out. Behind her was an elderly woman with bright, birdlike eyes who introduced herself to Paul.

"I'm Mrs. Hanley." She smiled. "I've heard about you from Lena. I'm told you are a great musician," she remarked, still searching his face with those bright eyes.

Paul laughed outright. "I pound the piano a little."

"I don't want to keep you—just wanted to say how do you do." As though satisfied, Mrs. Hanley gave Lena a tender, encouraging smile. "Have a good time," she said.

At the Botanical Gardens, which lay in the Wortley suburbs, Paul and Lena surveyed pleasant rolling lawns and the avenue of shapely chestnut trees leading to a distant lake. "There won't be much to see outside this time of year," Paul said, "but let's take a walk before we do the greenhouse. Incidentally, Lena, you're looking extremely nice today."

She made no answer to this casual compliment. He had never realized what natural grace and individuality she possessed, with her warm complexion, dark hazel eyes and thick honey-colored hair, her graceful figure and easy carriage. He was suddenly curious to know more about her.

"Tell me about yourself, Lena . . . your family . . . your home."

Gazing ahead toward the silver shimmer of the lake, she told him that she had been born in the east-coast fishing town of Sleescale. Her father, widowed when she was a young child, had been part owner of a herring trawler. He died when she was eighteen, and her two brothers sailed to seek their fortune in the wheat fields of Canada. Before they left she had come to the resort town of Astbury, some twenty miles east of Wortley, to work in the reception office of the County Arms Hotel.

"Didn't you like Astbury?" Paul asked, after a moment.

"Very much."

"But you left?"

"Yes."

It seemed odd that she should abandon a position as hotel receptionist in favor of her present job in a cheap cafeteria. Yet that was her affair and, since her manner had become withdrawn, he relinquished the subject. They went on toward the glass houses where, tier upon tier, masses of exotic blossoms were banked.

As they went round the beautiful collection, Paul was struck by the reaction of his companion. For once, the cloud of sadness that hung over her was lifted and she began to talk about the specimens with animation. When they stood before a young orange tree, she gazed at it as though its fragrant beauty had pierced her through and through. Watching her, he saw tears form beneath her lashes. Unexpectedly, his heart swelled.

They had tea in the Japanese pagoda which served as a restaurant. It was a drafty little place and the tea was weak but their sense of comradeship loosened their tongues, made them forget the inadequacies of the meal.

"You haven't asked why I'm at the Bonanza." He spoke suddenly, unexpectedly, after a pause.

"No," she answered, adding, "I imagine you have a reason for being there. Some kind of trouble?" He nodded. "I hope it's going to be all right," she said in a low voice.

Something in the simple words touched him. Her profile, severe and sad like a young madonna, was lit by the lingering twilight.

Presently they left the Gardens and set out on the journey back to Ware Place. Lena seemed to be debating some question in her mind and once or twice she glanced at him as though about to speak. Outside Mrs. Hanley's house they drew up.

"It's been a wonderful afternoon," she said. "I enjoyed it very much. Thank you for taking me."

She hesitated, her eyes searching his face, her breath coming faster as though an inner desire to communicate with him had suddenly become intense.

"Paul . . ." It was the first time she had used his Christian name.

"Yes?"

She glanced at him, then away, affected by an actual physical distress. "Oh, it doesn't matter. Never mind."

Whatever it was that she wished to say, she simply could not



say it. Instead, hurriedly, she murmured: "Good night." Then she turned and walked quickly up to the house.

Paul stood for a moment, perplexed. At last he moved off.

It was about six o'clock when he got back to his lodgings, with the *Sunday Courier*. He opened it with his usual anticipation.

At first, he thought he had again drawn a blank. But, at the foot of a column, the name he had been seeking leaped at him from the printed page. The paragraph was quite short.

In the House of Commons, Mr. George Birley (Wortley, Liberal) raised the question of the case of Rees Mathry, now undergoing a term of life imprisonment in Stoneheath Prison. Was it not a fact, asked the right honorable gentleman, that the new evidence which he had brought forward might demand a reconsideration of the case? Moreover, in view of the fact that Mathry had already served fifteen years, was he not now due to be paroled?

Replying, Sir Walter Hamilton (Secretary of State) stated that the answer to both questions was in the negative. In the first place, he saw no reason whatsoever to interfere with the normal processes of justice, and, in the second, the prison record of the man Mathry was so bad that he had forfeited any right to pardon. The matter should be considered as finally and completely closed.

Paul laid the newspaper on the table. There was a knock at the door and his landlady came into the room. She gave him a swift glance and handed him a special-delivery letter.

It was from George Birley. Further action, he wrote, would be utterly useless. He softened the blow as best he could, urged his young friend to put the whole unhappy affair out of his head forever. It was a good letter, well-meaning and unquestionably kindly. It nearly broke Paul's heart.

NEXT MORNING, after a sleepless night, Paul sat at the piano doggedly hammering out cheap music. He noticed a bunch of marigolds on his piano. Lena, obviously, had placed them there. When she brought his lunch he mumbled a few words of thanks.

His manner troubled her. "Is anything wrong?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, in a strained voice. "Everything."

Before she could question him further, she was called back to the cafeteria. As she moved away, Paul caught Harris watching

as arranged and I will try and be there. With my best respects no more no less at the present time.

L. B.

A cry of satisfaction rose to Paul's lips. Burt was still unsuspecting, the opportunity remained open to him. He had worried constantly lest Birley's action might compromise him further with the authorities. Now he felt convinced that the paragraph in the *Courier* relating to his father had passed altogether unnoticed in Wortley. In this belief, unfortunately, he was quite mistaken.

CHAPTER 5

THAT same morning, at the precise moment when Paul received Burt's letter, a man of forty-five, slightly portly, stood after breakfast in the morning room of his house, gazing through the window toward the wide lawn. From the adjoining room came the chatter of his two daughters and his wife, Catharine. But despite these cheerful signs of family unity, Sir Matthew Sprott's mood was irritable.

The entry of a maidservant, who began silently to clear the table, disturbed his train of thought. He went toward his study, frowning a little, pausing to stare absently at the finest of his pictures. He prized his fine things—the Aubusson rugs, the Rodin and Maillol bronzes, the two Constable landscapes. They were so unmistakably the proof of his success.

He had risen, in his own phrase, "from less than nothing." An orphan child, he had been brought up by an aunt, a gaunt woman who, begrimed every day with coal dust, eked out an existence as a pit-head screener in the impoverished colliery district of Gadskill. From the very beginning Sprott had been dominated by one desire—to succeed. The motto *I will get on, get on, get on* was engraved upon his heart.

He had chosen the law as a career, not from predilection, but because he sensed it offered the likeliest chance for power. He had entered the office of Thomas Hailey, a reputable county solicitor, as a clerk, and set out to make himself indispensable to his aged employer. At the end of five years, when he passed the final examination of the Law Society, he walked out and set up for himself, leaving Hailey, who was in poor health and quite de-

out of the corner of his eye. Presently the manager strolled over.

"So you and the lady friend made a little expedition yesterday?"

"Expedition?" Paul's eyebrows contracted.

"Sure. The girls told me you was out together." Something between a sneer and a smirk spread over Harris's face. He leaned over the piano. "I thought I'd warned you about Andersen. Don't you know she had a child? And her not married, either. It was deaf and dumb, and died in some kind of a fit. Talk it over, next time you go out with her. She might give you the details."

In the pause which followed, Harris's sneer became predominant, then he nodded meaningly and walked away.

Paul's eyes remained fixed on the manager's retreating back. God, what a slimy type! So that was the reason for Lena's fits of sadness. Poor girl! Pity flowed into his heart; yet this pity was strangely cold, and somehow it quenched the small warm flame that had been kindled there. All the Puritan in him was jarred and outraged by this revelation.

That afternoon wave after wave of bitterness swept over him. Poor Swann had been right—all hope of official help was futile, he must see this thing through on his own. And, by heaven, he would! Whatever the risk, he must make a fresh approach to Burt—she was now his only chance. If the authorities had rapped Mark Boulia over the knuckles, they had no grounds for doing so with Burt. It was just possible that she had not been warned.

In the evening he went straight back to his lodgings, took a plain paper pad and an envelope, and wrote:

Dear Louisa,

I was very upset at missing our previous engagement but it was not my fault. I hope you forgive me. Will you meet me next Wednesday at the Oak? Be there for sure, Louisa, round about seven o'clock. Looking forward to the pleasure of your society,

Yours,
Paul

Two days later he received this reply:

Dear Sir:

I would like to meet you only be careful and don't come round the garden nor the back door no more. Just be at the same place

pendent upon his services, in the lurch. But what did that matter?

Sprott had little money and few connections and for many months after he was called to the bar he haunted the courts, a briefless advocate. Then a registrar's appointment was offered him. He accepted it, but only as a springboard from which to make himself useful to those in power. Gradually he became known as a man of intelligence and immense industry, with a specialized knowledge of criminal law. Better still, he was a good speaker, with a notable power, amounting almost to genius, of playing upon the emotions of the jury. In 1910, when the parliamentary elections came round, he enlisted under the banners of the Conservative candidate, Sir Henry Longden. When Longden was elected, Sprott received his reward. The Crown appointed him Recorder to the City of Wortley.

For some years Sprott slaved there, a terror to the debtors, delinquents and wrongdoers of the city. He cultivated, assiduously, the people who could be of use to him. Yet, despite all his efforts, preferment did not come to him. Would he never *get on, get on, get on?*

Suddenly there occurred a heaven-sent opportunity. A murder case which had excited popular interest was due for trial and it was decided to entrust the Crown case to Matthew Sprott.

This was the turning point of his career. He flung himself, with every weapon at his command, into the prosecution of Rees Mathry. His intention was to focus attention upon his own powers, to overwhelm with his brilliance and, come what may, to convict the prisoner. And he succeeded.

Before eight months had passed he had resigned his recordership and, while retaining his provincial home, opened an office in London. He was more and more frequently called as Prosecutor for the Crown, a position which he filled so admirably that, in 1933, he received a knighthood. Now, at forty-five, comparatively young and full of energy, he felt himself poised for even higher flights. He had been asked to stand as Conservative candidate for Wortley at the coming election. Once in the House, the Attorney Generalship was not far away. And then, in time, might he not become Lord Chief Justice, perhaps even achieve the highest judicial pinnacle of all—Lord High Chancellor?

Of course, in such an upward struggle it had been essential to employ a certain ruthlessness. He had made enemies; it was said

of him that he was a toady to the great, that with every upward step he had planted his foot squarely in the face of the man who stood beneath him. In particular it was whispered that as Prosecutor for the Crown he brought to bear too strongly his great native talents for directing the course of justice.

Now, as he moved restlessly about his study, the Prosecutor's frown deepened. That question on the Mathry case, raised so suddenly in the House of Commons, had occasioned him bitter chagrin. The implications had been in the highest degree disagreeable. Within a restricted circle there had been considerable comment. The thing had even come to the ears of his dear wife, causing her to question him, mildly.

The only truly disinterested passion in Sprott's life was his affection for his family, especially for his wife. She was no more than the daughter of a Wortley doctor, and in marrying her for love he had been for once inconsistent to his own behavior pattern. Yet her gentle companionship, her sustaining admiration and sweetness of disposition had more than rewarded him. It was apprehension that his reputation might suffer some slight slur in her eyes which at this moment decided him.

He took up the telephone, and called Police Headquarters.

TEN MINUTES later Chief Constable Dale, in answer to the summons, set out toward Grove Quadrant. At Sprott's house he was shown into the small study on the right of the hall.

"Ah, there you are, Dale," Sprott said, extending his hand. "You're well, I hope."

"Quite well."

"Good." The Public Prosecutor sat down and stroked his lip.

"Dale . . . did you notice that bit of nonsense in the House . . . about the Mathry case?"

Dale concealed his surprise. "I did notice it, Sir Matthew."

"Of course the whole thing is absurd . . . political mudslinging. Still," Sprott shook his head, "we have to watch out these days that none of the mud sticks to us. That young fool, the son, seems a troublesome sort . . . the complete crank with a grievance. The question is what to do about him."

For a full minute the Chief Constable held his tongue. He perceived now why the Prosecutor had telephoned to him and a curious sensation of doubt, touched by a vague malice, took hold

of him. Deliberately, he said: "Do you wish to prefer a charge against him?"

"By no means," Sprott protested. He looked straight at the Chief Constable. "However, it might be that you could induce him to leave Wortley."

"I've already told him to clear out."

"Words mean so very little. I make no suggestions whatsoever. Nevertheless, you may find it possible, in your own way, to bring him to a more reasonable frame of mind."

Sprott rose to his feet and stood with his back to the fireplace.

"I have gone through the records of the Mathry case. We have nothing to reproach ourselves with. Nevertheless, with elections falling due in a few months, a scandal at this juncture might undermine confidence in the whole judiciary, and in the government as well. That is why this idiotic affair must be suppressed."

Sprott held out his hand to terminate the interview. As Dale stepped out there was no longer a question in his mind. Somehow the thought had changed its form, was now fixed, a thorn piercing his natural honesty. With a frigid face he muttered stubbornly to himself: "There can't . . . there can't be anything in it."

Yet his voice rang bleakly in his ears, and he resolved to temper Sprott's injunctions. He would watch young Mathry, but would not molest him unless he contravened the law.

WEDNESDAY NIGHT was dank and dark, with a cold drizzling rain. Paul reached the Royal Oak shortly after seven. He went to the table Burt usually occupied, glanced round, and decided he had nothing to worry about—the place was about half full but no one was paying the least attention to him. Then, as his eyes returned to the door, he saw Burt come in.

He got to his feet, holding out his hand in welcome.

"Louisa!" he exclaimed. "It's good to see you again."

She gave him a restrained smile and a ladylike pressure of her gloved fingers, then arranged herself affectedly at the table. "I didn't ought to have come," she remarked reproachfully. "After the way you disappointed me before. I believe you was out with another young lady."

"No, indeed," he protested. "You're the one I'm interested in."

"So you say. You fellas is all alike." She patted the puffs of hair over her ears, and nodded an intimate greeting to the waiter.

"The usual, Jack. Bring the bottle."

Paul forced an admiring smile. "You look a treat tonight."

"Get away with you!" she said, but she was flattered.

"I hope you had no difficulty in getting here?" Paul said.

She straightened. "What makes you say that?"

"Why, you mentioned it in your letter, about being careful."

"Yes . . . so I did." She sat back and took a sip of her drink. "It's just that the housekeep . . . that Mr. Oswald is shocking particular about some things. He's very high-principled. You've surely heard of him? One of the biggest charity contributors in Wortley. Gives hundreds away to the hospitals every year, and in the winter puts up a free coffee stall. They call it the Silver King Canteen. He's always treated me like a lady, else I wouldn't still be there."

"Then you've been there some time?"

"I wasn't more nor eighteen when they took me in."

"I'm surprised you never married."

Under his flattery she gave a conceited little smirk.

"The Oswalds keeps on saying what a good thing if I settled down. Well, I might one of these days, you never can tell. But at the present time, catch me! I like a bit of fun. Do you blame me?"

The pattern he had suspected was emerging clearly: the philanthropic Oswalds had befriended this girl, had done their best to keep her on a steady course. But despite this, there existed in her mind a deep-rooted grudge against life. And suddenly he saw how he could use this to his advantage, to secure the very thing he sought. Controlling his excitement, he murmured, "It seems odd that anyone as smart as you shouldn't have a better job."

"You're right," she nodded sulkily, her eyes filling with tears of self-pity. "The truth is, dearie, I've had a dirty deal. And after all I've went through. Oh, it was right enough at first. They put me in all the papers . . . photographs and everything . . . on the front page . . . just like I was a queen."

Paul laughed, with just the correct note of incredulity.

She reacted immediately. "So you think I'm a liar, eh? It may interest you to know . . ." She broke off.

"Ah, I knew you were joking." He smiled and shook his head.

Her face went red. She brought her head close across the table.

"Is it a joke to nearly get a man hung?"

"Oh, no," he exclaimed, in shocked admiration. "But you never did that?"



She nodded her head slowly, then tossed off her second gin.

"That's the very thing I done. But for yours truly, they'd never of got him. I was the big noise in the case."

"Well!" he exclaimed in an awed tone. "You could knock me over with a feather. I never dreamed . . ."

"Let that be a lesson to you—" she sunned herself in his open adulation "—as to the lady in whose society you find yourself. And I could surprise you a lot more if I wanted."

"Go ahead then."

She gave him a sly and amorous glance.

"That would be telling, Mr. Curious. Still, I've took to you. A perfect gent if I say so to your face. And it's so long ago . . . it can't reely hurt." She lifted her glass. "Well, here's how . . . chin,

chin, and all the best. Now, suppose yours truly had somethink up her sleeve that could reely of blew the lid off. For instance . . . ever hear of such a thing as a bright-green bicycle?"

"Bright-green?"

"That's right, dearie. Bright-green." She broke into a titter. "Green as grassh."

"I've never seen one that wasn't black."

"That's what they all said in court. Laughed, they did, when some old bird swore he saw the man ride off on a green bicycle. But I could of made them laugh a different tune. I knew my way around when I was a kid . . . I was always on the streets, I was. I knew about green bicycles."

As she hesitated, Paul laughed incredulously.

"I believe you're making all this up."

"What!" She flushed indignantly. "You won't make me a liar. Just at that time there was a cycling club in Eldon made up of fellows what called themselves the Grasshoppers. And, just for swank, every member's bike 'ad to be a special bright-green color."

"The Grasshoppers?" He spoke with assumed indifference. "Then the man that owned the bike you speak of must have been a member of the club."

"Exactly. And the kind that might 'ave 'ad fancy tastes . . . and a fancy sort of purse . . . say one actually made out of a human being's skin. Do I shock you?"

Paul tried desperately not to show too much interest. Surreptitiously he refilled Burt's glass. He said, "Indeed you do."

"Now I ask you, dearie, what kind of a person would 'ave that sort of purse?"

"A crazy person?"

"Ah, go lay an egg. What about a medical stoddent?"

"Good Lord," Paul exclaimed. He recollected now that at Queen's University a few of the bolder anatomy students often removed portions of epidermis from the dissecting rooms and had them tanned as souvenirs. There was a vibrant silence—Paul simply could not speak. Delighted with the effect she was producing, Burt gave a prolonged titter and took a fresh sip of gin.

"I could make your hair stand on end if I wanted. For instance, the fella the cops got their hooks on was married. All the girls that worked in the florist's shop where he dropped in occasional-like, they knew it, including Mona—that's the young woman

what got done in. Now from what I knew about *her*, she'd never of got herself mixed up with a married man. She was too much out for a good match. . . . In other words the gent what got her in trouble was single. Furthermore, she'd been in the family way for a good four months. Now the fella they accused 'ad only known her a matter of six weeks. 'E couldn't 'ave 'ad nothink to do with the condition she was in."

Paul raised his hand to his eyes to mask the emotion which overwhelmed him. In a hoarse voice he muttered: "Why . . . why was this never brought out?"

"Don't ask me," laughed Burt. "Ask them what ran the show. They 'ad a lawyer there what tied everybody in knots."

The Public Prosecutor! At every turn Paul was confronted by this high official, the power which had crushed his father, ruthlessly, into the living death of Stoneheath. For the first time in his life Paul knew hatred and with a burning question on his lips he leaned toward his companion.

But at that moment a startling change came over Burt. Her eyes, looking over Paul's shoulder, were stricken with sudden panic.

"Excuse me." Burt spoke in faltering tones. "I've suddenly come over giddy. . . . I got to get out."

Paul bit his lip. It was maddening to be interrupted like this, just when he had brought Burt to the point of making the most vital disclosure of all. He spoke in a lowered voice: "What is it?"

"A copper."

Half turning, Paul stared at the square-headed man at the next table. Unconsciously, perhaps, he had been aware of the man who had not once in the past twenty minutes changed the position of the newspaper which half concealed his face. But now, imperceptibly, he lowered it, revealing himself as Sergeant Jupp.

Paul took a grip of himself, turned back to Burt.

"It is a bit hot in here. A breath of air will put you right."

Before she could protest, he called the waiter and paid for the drinks. They stood up. Immediately Sergeant Jupp got up too and walked out of the bar before them.

Paul's nerves were jangling as he walked out with Burt. Would a hand be laid once again upon his shoulder, hauling him off to Police Headquarters on some trumped-up charge? He could see the policeman outside, waiting. Grimly, taking the wilting Burt's arm, he kept on his way.

"Just a minute."

Paul drew up, and faced the sergeant.

"I've been watching you in there. You're annoying this young woman." He turned toward Burt. "This fellow's been interfering with you . . . hasn't he?"

There was a hollow pause. Then, with a gasp, Burt shrilled:

"Oh, he has . . . askin' me to go with him . . . and all."

"All right. Clear out of here quick."

As Burt took to her heels Jupp gave Paul a meaning glance.

"Now look here, Mathry, we're not going to run you in. But the Chief wants you to know this is your second warning and he hopes you're wise enough to take it."

Instead of relief, Paul felt a blinding anger sweep over him. This assumed indulgence was harder to bear than actual injury. It was useless to follow Burt now. Breathing quickly, he swung abruptly into the shadows and turned the corner of the street. As he walked home, his sense of outrage grew. His contact with Burt was irreparably broken: she would never recover from this scare.

CHAPTER 6

NEXT MORNING he had a clearer perception of what he had gained the previous evening. Interrupted though the interview had been, he had nevertheless obtained from Burt several vital facts. Reflecting deeply, Paul now realized that if the owner of the skin purse had been a medical student he must by this time almost certainly have qualified as a doctor. By checking the Medical Directory against an old list of the members of the Grasshoppers Club it might be possible to determine his identity.

Spurred by this fresh hope, Paul hurried to the store. At the Bonanza he found Harris waiting inside the main entrance. The assistants, including Lena, had their eyes on the manager.

"You're sacked," said Harris abruptly. "We've no use in this store for police suspects." Giving Paul no opportunity to answer, he swung round and walked back to his office. As he traversed the aisle the assistants busied themselves at the counters—all but Lena, who stood, pale and undecided, at her desk.

With a raw hurt in his breast Paul turned and went out of the store. At first, in a fury of resentment, he strode without purpose

through the city. Gradually he grew calm. At least he was now at liberty to put his deductions of the previous evening to the test.

He stepped into a telephone booth and by consulting the directory discovered that the National Cyclists' Union had a Wortley office. In ten minutes he reached the building, and stood at the inquiry desk in the map-hung foyer.

The secretary received his inquiry and, taking up a handbook, flipped the pages. But her search was unproductive.

"We seem to have no present record of such a club, but if it's important I might let you look over our back records."

She showed him into a small annex beside the office and indicated a rack of yellow-and-green paper-backed books.

Left alone, Paul went through all the handbooks for the past twenty years. There was no record of the Grasshoppers Club.

Discouraged, but undeterred, he reflected that if such a club had actually existed its members must have procured their machines from some local store. He set out on a systematic tour of all the cycle agencies in the city. But no one had even heard of the organization. He told himself despondently that the whole thing must be a fantasy created by Burt.

At four o'clock in the afternoon, he had reached the outskirts of Eldon in search of the last address on the list of cycle agencies. It was little more than a petrol station, but in the yard he perceived a few secondhand bicycles. Nothing could have seemed less promising; yet he crossed over and put the question to a man in overalls who was hosing down the concrete pavement.

"The Grasshoppers," the garage proprietor repeated to himself. "Come to think of it, when my father was alive, I heard him speak of them. I believe he used to repair bicycles they used . . . all painted green."

"Then he must have known the members. He kept records?"

"Not him. Cash over the handle bars was always his motto."

"But there must have been a list of members somewhere."

"I very much doubt it. According to my impression, it was a group of young fellows more out for a lark than anything else."

"If you find anything at all bearing on the club, please let me know," Paul said. "I'll be most grateful."

He gave his name and address and set off for home.

Fatigued by useless effort, he lost his way, and found himself unexpectedly in Grove Quadrant, a residential district given over

to stately houses. Suddenly, as he trudged along, he noted a letter box fixed upon an imposing gate, and his eye was caught by a small brass plate which bore the name: *Sir Matthew Sprott*.

Halted, transfixed by that name, Paul stared at the garden and the mansion. This was the Prosecutor's home. All that secret sense of accusation which had grown within his breast rushed over Paul.

Here was a man of paramount intelligence, a legal expert. How had it come about that he had ignored evidence of the first importance—the green bicycle, the skin purse, above all, the duration of the murdered woman's pregnancy? Had he willfully ignored facts favorable to the accused and used all his power and personality to crush a feeble opposition and secure a conviction which he knew to be false? Rage and rancor rose within Paul, but he turned away and went on down the hill.

Back in his room he began, nervously, to pace up and down. He had proved that there was vital substance in Burt's story, but his inability to act upon it galled him. Just as he felt he could endure his restlessness no longer, there came a knock upon the door. When he opened it, Lena Andersen stood before him, poised uncertainly upon the threshold. Her eyes were wide and startled, her brows marred by concern.

"Paul . . . I'm sorry to disturb you . . . I had to come. This afternoon at the store . . . someone called to see you."

At the sight of her, so unexpected, his gaze instinctively had brightened. But insidious as poison came the recollection of what Harris had told him. Unconsciously, his manner chilled as he said: "Will you come in?"

"No. I have to get back at once. It was a queer little man who came—a Mr. Prusty, of Fifty-two Ushaw Terrace. He wants you to call and see him tonight, no matter how late. He said it was terribly important."

"Thank you," Paul said. "You've done me a good turn."

"It's nothing. If there's any way I can help . . ."

Her sympathy swept him with an overwhelming desire to confide in her. But he would not yield to it. He forced a smile.

"Haven't you enough troubles of your own?"

She glanced at him inquiringly.

"If I have, won't I understand yours better?" For an instant her eyes held his; then she turned and was gone.

Immediately a sense of deprivation filled him. He was tempted

to rush to the landing to detain her, but nine strokes from a nearby clock deterred him.

He took up his hat and coat, and set out for 52 Ushaw Terrace.

THE TOBACCONIST was at home, wrapped in a thick woolen comforter. He poured out a cup of coffee for his visitor and insisted on sharing a meat pie, but despite this hospitality Paul had a strong suspicion that he was less welcome than before. Prusty kept examining him with surreptitious glances, and by a series of shrewd questions managed to acquaint himself fully with Paul's doings in the past few weeks.

When he had done so he made no immediate comment, but his air was somber as he selected and lit a cheroot.

"So that's it." He meditated, frowning. "No wonder I felt the whole thing was waking up again. For all these years it's been buried . . . now it's like as if, when you put your ear to the ground, you heard a faint stirring in the grave."

The parlor, darkened by the falling snow, seemed suddenly full of shadows. "As yet it's all undercover," Prusty went on. "But there's omens and portents . . . there's a resurrection coming. I feel it even in this room." He cast his eyes upward. "And in the room above."

Paul suppressed a shiver. "Is it still unoccupied?"

The tobacconist nodded his head. "Blank empty." He paused. "It's got around, what you've been doing," Prusty went on. "And it's penetrated to some queer places. That's the reason I asked you to visit me. Last Friday a man called to see me. I was out. Mrs. Lawson, the woman who comes to clean up for me, was here. She's a plain, sensible woman who doesn't scare easy. But the very sight of this man frightened her near out of her wits. His face was hard and dead white. His head was cropped, down to the bone. Mrs. Lawson took her oath he was a convict."

"Who could it be?" Paul's lips were dry.

"Lord knows, but I'll lay you odds he came from Stoneheath. Before he bolted, he left a message." Prusty took from his waistcoat pocket a paper which he unrolled and handed over.

Paul read the words again and again. *Don't let them throw you off. Find Charles Castles in the Lanes. He'll tell you what to do.*

Who had written this desperate message? Paul sat upright in his chair. What if this scrap of paper had come from his father's

hands, delivered by a fellow prisoner who had been released?

The room was now almost dark. The gas fire cast no more than a glow upon the hearth. Outside, the darkness had intensified. Immersed in his reflections, throbbing with fresh hope, Paul sat motionless. Suddenly, and without warning, there came the sound of a footstep upon the floor above.

Paul stiffened, and for a moment thought he must surely be mistaken. But the footstep was repeated, again, yet again, with a hollow, a mournful regularity. Paul sat up, his eyes fixed upon the ceiling. Prusty was staring upward with equal consternation.

"You said the flat was empty," Paul whispered.

"I swear it is," Prusty answered.

With unusual agility Prusty sprang from his seat, rushed through the lobby and out of the flat. At the same time there came the slam of the door above, succeeded by footsteps descending the stairs. Paul's impulse had been to follow Prusty but now an exclamation, as of relief, from the outside landing, arrested him, halfway to the hall. He heard first a word of greeting in an unknown voice, then Prusty's voice. Then came some quiet conversation and finally a friendly "good night."

A minute later Prusty returned, wiping his forehead. He shut the door, lit the gas chandelier, then turned to Paul with a slightly sheepish air. "It was our landlord," he explained. "The roof is leaking. He was up to see about it." Prusty drew his comforter tighter around his shoulders. "Sitting in the dark makes a man fancy things. I let my imagination run away with me."

"You didn't imagine this scrap of paper," Paul said. He rolled it up. "Can I keep it?"

"I'll be glad to be rid of it," said Prusty.

As Paul hurried back to Poole Street, his thoughts were feverish and confused. But now at least he had a direct and powerful lead—he would follow it to the end.

STANDING in his doorway next morning, Paul's landlady scrutinized him doubtfully. "I'm sorry, but you're a week overdue with your rent," she said. "I'll give you till tomorrow evening. If you haven't got work by then, I'm afraid you must go."

Paul had no intention of seeking regular work, and had not more than ten shillings in his pocket. Yet he did not wish to victimize her. When she had gone he considered his few possessions.

If she sold them, they would perhaps pay what he owed her. Beyond what he was wearing, he took only his papers relating to the case. Then, with a last look round the room, he went out.

The Lanes, which he reached toward ten o'clock, was the name given to one of the worst sections of the city, a network of narrow, twisted streets, hemmed in by tall, dilapidated buildings. All that day Paul combed these streets trying, without success, to locate the man named Castles. When evening came he made his way to the heart of the district, where for ninepence he was admitted to a workmen's lodginghouse.

The beds were strips of sacking, stretched out like low hammocks on two long ropes. At one end was a kitchen where a crowd of ragged men armed with frying pans were pushing for places to cook their supper.

With a glance toward this crowd Paul lay down on his hammock, and pulled up the thin worn gray blanket.

"Don't you want no dinner, mate? I'll cook for both, mate, if you have a bit of grub about you." Paul turned to see an undersized man with a shrunken, humorous face in the next hammock.

"Sorry," Paul said. "I had something before I came in."

"Ah, you're lucky, mate. Me, I could eat an ox."

Paul leaned toward him. "I'm looking for a man called Castles. Have you ever heard of him?"

"Charlie Castles? Sure, I've heard of him. Who ain't?"

"Where can I find him?"

"He's away for the present. Like enough on a job. Should be back in a few days. You know who he is, don't you?"

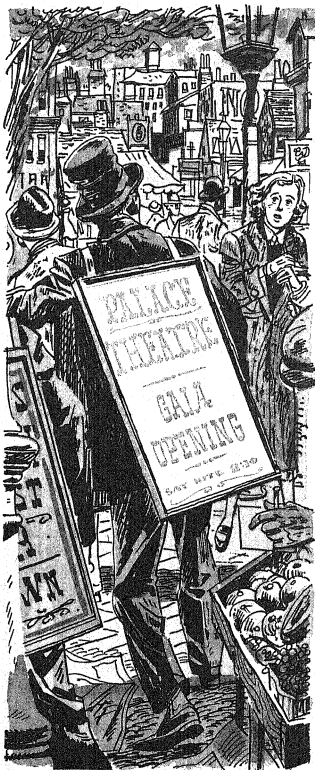
Paul shook his head.

"He's a wrong 'un all right . . . welsher on the race tracks . . . fence for stolen property in his spare time. He's just new out on parole after a long stretch in Stoneheath."

Paul drew in his breath sharply.

NEXT MORNING his neighbor of the night before—Jerry the Moke was his name—was going to try for a day with "the boards." He offered to take Paul with him.

At first Paul was about to refuse. But to find Castles he had to keep in touch with his odd companion, and with almost nothing in his pocket he had to keep himself alive. He moved off with the other in the direction of Dukes Row.



They took their places in a line outside a dilapidated yard bearing the sign *LANE'S BILLBOARD AND ADVERTISING COMPANY*. After about an hour the gate was opened and the first twenty men, including Paul and his companion, were admitted. Inside the yard stood a row of sandwich boards for the *Palace Theatre*. Imitating the others, Paul lifted one of the double boards upon his shoulders, and moved back toward the big gate. He fell in line behind Jerry the Moke.

All day long the line wove through the streets of the city. The boards were heavy and awkward, and snapped back on the shoulder muscles. But at five o'clock the men were back at Dukes Row, where each one was paid two shillings and ninepence.

Every day that week Paul went out with the boards. It was humiliating work—to attract attention the men had to wear some odd article of dress, and one morning Paul was sent out in a battered top hat. Toward

noon, as he paraded along Ware Place, he saw one of the Bonanza assistants, Nancy Wilson, coming toward him. Quickly he lowered his head, but not before she had recognized him, a look of startled surprise appearing on her face. He did not care. With the money he received he was able to exist.

But the blight of the doss house where he lived infected Paul, filled him with a sense of desperation and despair. More and more he brooded through sleepless nights, his thoughts running with growing bitterness to the main instrument of his father's suffering, the Prosecutor, Matthew Sprott.

Toward the end of the week, Paul and Jerry were turned away at the advertising company's yard. Jerry shrugged. "They often run out on us. Post the notices instead. We'll try the station."

Together they went to the railway station and for the next two days hung around on the chance of carrying a bag. The few tips he received kept Paul going until Saturday. On the evening of that day as they entered the doss house Jerry drew up short, and pointed to a tall, sinewy man of about forty with a pale, narrow face and small eyes, a derby hat on his head.

"There you are then, mate," exclaimed Jerry, in a low voice. "That's Castles . . . and watch out how you use him."

LATER THAT night, in a small back room which Castles had rented, Paul faced this man whom he had so anxiously awaited. Despite his unprepossessing appearance he was educated and of obvious intelligence.

"What do you want with me?" asked Castles.

Without speaking, Paul handed him the paper which Prusty had given him. Castles glanced at it carelessly, then handed it back. "So that's what brought you."

"Who sent me that message? Was it . . . was it my father?"

"I dare say it could have been."

"Then . . . you knew him in Stoneheath?"

"Yes, we had adjoining suites. We used to tap-talk at night . . . when he wasn't in solitary."

"How is he?" The words came with a gasp.

"Bad. In fact, couldn't be worse."

Paul bit his lip fiercely. "Why was I told to find you?"

"Your old man knew I was getting out. Thought we ought to meet. He slipped me this bunch of drivel."

Paul took the papers the other handed to him—little more than soiled scraps covered with a pencil scrawl. But as he read the almost illegible words, his eagerness died. They were no more than protestations and complaints, offering no further evidence. Dully, he raised his eyes to Castles. "Then you can't help me?"

"That depends," Castles said slowly, drawing deeply on his cigarette, "on what kind of help you want."

"You know what I want," Paul exclaimed passionately. "To dig out a poor devil who's been buried alive for fifteen years."

"Never." Castles spoke disdainfully. "After fifteen years you haven't a dog's chance. Whoever did it could be a thousand miles away. Changed name. New identity. Maybe dead. It's hopeless." He waited to let his words sink in, his yellow eyes fixed steadily on Paul. Then he went on: "Why don't you go after the legal killer . . . the man who really did Mathry in?"

"Who do you mean?"

"The man who prosecuted him—Sir Matthew Sprott."

Paul caught his breath. "For God's sake . . . who are you?"

"It's no secret—I'm in the records . . . convicted embezzler. At least, that's how it began. I only needed a little time to pay the money back. I begged Sprott for it. Instead I got seven years. So you see we're in the same boat, you and me. We owe everything to that one man. You've never met the gentleman?"

"No."

A strange light flickered in Castles' eyes. "The High Court is in session now, Lord Oman presiding, Sir Matthew Sprott prosecuting . . . wouldn't you like to see them?"

Staring at the other, Paul did not answer.

"It's such an opportunity . . . the last day of the trial. Surely you'd like to come with me tomorrow afternoon . . . and see how they do it? Mind you, this one won't be so exciting. Just a wretched little bawd who's knifed her lover."

"No," Paul said violently.

Castles' face hardened. "If you don't want me to help you, go your own way, and I'll go mine."

Paul could not reject the proffered aid. "I'll go," he said.

ON THE following afternoon, Paul met the ex-convict as arranged. Castles, who was shaved and respectably dressed in a drab suit, apparently knew his way about the High Court Build-

ing. He led Paul through a side archway and up a broad staircase to a heavy mahogany door, guarded by an official to whom he handed two admission cards. The officer laid his finger on his lips, then directed them into a narrow public gallery.

Below lay the crowded court—the robed judge on his dais, the jury box, the witness stand and, in the center, the dock, where a young woman in a cheap shawl stood between two policemen. Gripping the gallery rail, Paul leaned forward, his gaze bent upon Lord Oman. His lordship was an aged figure, stooped slightly, as though beneath the weight of honors. His face was haughty, fixed in implacable severity.

Castles pointed toward a figure rising at the front of the court. "There, getting ready to speak . . . Sprott."

Paul looked at the compact form of the prosecuting counsel in curled wig and somber black robe. He pursed his mobile lips, his fine eyes darting like an actor's, and began to address the jury.

Sordid and wretched, the facts were of the simplest. The accused was a prostitute. She had, inevitably, a "protector," who lived with her upon her earnings, who, in fact, preyed upon her and often beat her brutally. One night, when she was drunk, she had stabbed him, then turned the knife ineffectually upon herself.

Sprott dwelt upon this miserable story in dramatic detail, indicating to the jury that no thought of extenuating circumstances should cause them to compromise their verdict. It appeared to Paul that the Prosecutor was reveling in the execution of his duty. When he concluded, with a final dramatic gesture, a thrust with the actual knife showing how it had pierced the victim's heart, he sat down amid a deathly stillness.

"Take a good look at him." Castles' hoarse voice was keyed to a whisper. "That's how he worked on Mathry."

Staring rigidly at the Prosecutor, Paul was conscious of a surge of extraordinary emotion. He thought of all the merciless and unwarranted vituperation this man had heaped upon his father. It roused in Paul's breast a wild thirsting for revenge.

Presently, the speech for the defense was over, and the judge had concluded his summing up. The jury retired.

"Four o'clock," Castles remarked, drawing back his pale lips. "Just in nice time for them all to have tea."

Paul's neighbor on the other side was eating sandwiches from a paper bag. "You two came in a bit late," he said. "You missed

the best of the sport. You ought to have heard Sprott this morning. Gave it to her hot and strong. She'll swing all right."

The jury came back now, and the judge.

"Guilty!"

The little man had predicted it. But he had not predicted the scream from the poor wretch, cowering beneath her shawl, nor the fit of coughing which followed. His lordship, frigidly annoyed, was forced to wait until it ceased. Then the black cap—Paul stared as the crape was laid upon the judge's head—and with the words "to hang by the neck till you are dead," fifteen years were rolled away. Paul felt all that his father must have felt.

"It's all over," Castles said agreeably. "Not bad for a matinee."

In a daze, Paul accompanied him out through the wide forecourt. Castles put a hand on his companion's arm.

"Why don't we go to my place for a drink? We need it." He seemed trying to estimate Paul's reaction, cold and curious, as though he were watching an insect pinned beneath a magnifying glass. Yet behind that brow Paul sensed emotions darker even than his own.

"All right." In his emotion Paul didn't care what he did, or where he went. They walked off together.

When they got to his room, Castles poured out two drinks. Paul emptied his glass at a gulp and made no protest when Castles refilled it for him. The ex-convict stood for a moment observing the young man, conscious that the crisis was at hand. That unique combination of chances he had so often longed for was at last before him. Paul was a heaven-sent instrument of revenge.

At the time of his "disgrace" Charles Castles had been trust officer for a large insurance company. A bachelor with sporting tastes, he lived well, patronized the neighboring race meetings. To such a man, astute and venturesome, it was second nature to gamble "on a good thing." Thus, when information reached him of an amalgamation planned between his own and a smaller company—a merger which would prove immensely favorable to the minor concern—he borrowed from funds under his control, and bought fifty thousand shares of the smaller company's stock.

The purchase was achieved discreetly, yet the amount involved was so large that a rumor reached the ears of the authorities. To Castles' dismay, an examination of his books was demanded by the sheriff, who was then Mr. Matthew Sprott. Immediately

Castles went to Sprott, whom he had often met socially, and, having freely acknowledged his culpability, asked him to stay the investigation for a mere ten days. Quite correctly, the sheriff refused. Under his direction Castles was rigorously investigated, prosecuted, found guilty, and given the maximum sentence.

He had hated Sprott with a deadly venom ever since and had sought unceasingly for revenge without danger to himself. And now . . . after all these years . . . had come Mathry's son hell-bent on the melodramatic folly of "clearing his father's name."

Castles could resist no longer.

"I must admit you took it well this afternoon, making yourself go through with it," he said. "With everything gone wrong, I don't blame you for losing heart. You're battering your head against a stone wall. That's why I wanted you to see Sprott. He's the mastermind. He's the one who put your father into Stoneheath. *And so long as he's around you'll never get him out.*"

In the silence which followed, a vision of the Prosecutor, supremely self-assured, rose before Paul. A strange fever began to throb in his veins.

Castles continued as though thinking aloud. "Yes, Sprott is the one who did it. Yet how can you get at such a man? He is entrenched."

"There must be some way of reaching him."

"No, Paul . . . there isn't." Castles then hesitated. "Well, there's *one* way . . . go to Sprott . . . to his house . . . and square your account with him . . . but of course it's impossible."

Paul's eyes were dark and glittering.

"Why shouldn't I go and face up to Sprott? I can do it."

"Can you?" Castles questioned with intensity.

Paul stared back at him, in a dim perception of his meaning. The blood was pounding in his ears.

"Can you?" repeated Castles in a more insistent voice.

Paul nodded.

"It's the only way left for you to get justice. To take the matter into your own hands. If you do it, they can't hush up your father's case any longer. Everyone must hear about it. And Sprott, the conniver of the injustice, will be finished, done for. He deserved it, that's what they'll say. They'll say you were justified."

Paul got to his feet, goaded by these words, by all that he had witnessed at the trial, by the process of demoralization which for

the past ten days had been brought to bear upon him. He poured himself another drink, and swallowed it down.

"Here," said Castles in a hoarse whisper. "In case they try to stop you . . . take this." It was a black Webley automatic. Castles opened the door and Paul went out. He could feel the heavy weight in his pocket bumping against his thigh.

Alone in the room, Castles lit a cigarette, looked at his watch. A train for the North left in ten minutes. It was not wise to delay. He pulled on his overcoat and went out.

THAT SAME evening, when Sir Matthew Sprott let himself into his house, he found his wife coming toward him in the hall. She kissed him, helped him out of his coat.

"Matthew, dear, there's a young man waiting in the library."

He raised his eyebrows. It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her that for anyone to be allowed to trespass upon his privacy was quite contrary to his orders. But, because he adored her, he said nothing. He nodded his head and walked toward the library.

Paul sat perfectly still as Sir Matthew came in. He looked at him, but didn't speak. For a moment there was absolute silence. Then Sprott said: "What is the reason for this intrusion?"

He was very angry. At the same time there was something else in his eyes. Paul could tell immediately that he knew him. "You've no right to come to my private residence. You are trying to stir up trouble about a case that was judged fifteen years ago."

That remark revealed everything to Paul—the crack hidden away behind the grand façade. His brain suddenly became crystal-clear. He said slowly: "When a matter has been waiting for a long time it becomes urgent. There are doubts about that case. There is fresh evidence which should be heard."

"Don't be a fool," Sir Matthew said. "A petition to reopen was placed before the Secretary of State, and he refused categorically."

"But you need not refuse," Paul said. "You were the Prosecutor. Your main duty is to see that justice is administered. The least you can do is to hear the fresh evidence in your official capacity."

Sprott was so enraged he could scarcely speak. But with an effort he took hold of himself. He spoke in an icy tone.

"I really must ask you to go. You simply do not know what you are asking . . . the technical difficulties, the repercussions."

Sir Matthew's features were fixed in a heavy sneer. But Paul

could see again that vague misgiving, that secret fissure in the façade, and he knew that the Prosecutor must at all costs hide that crack. He would never, under any conditions, move to reopen the case. Still . . . he must give him one last chance.

"When a prisoner has served fifteen years of a life sentence . . . isn't it the humane practice . . . for him to be paroled? A word from you in the proper quarters would carry great influence."

The Prosecutor shook his head. He opened the door. "Will you go now? Or must I have you shown out?"

An uncontrollable rage came over Paul. Castles was right! Only one thing remained to be done. He stood up and started to walk toward the burly figure at the door.

"For the last time." His voice was barely audible.

"No."

He had his hand in his pocket. All the time he was talking he had been holding the gun. His finger was on the trigger and he had the gun pointed toward Sprott. The Prosecutor suspected nothing. Paul was abreast of him now, not more than two feet away. He shut his eyes, holding himself tense.

Then, all at once, a convulsive shudder shook his body; agonizingly he came back to reason, to himself. No, oh, my God, no, he thought in a stabbing flash of light. His grip on the gun relaxed. He opened his eyes, stared at the Prosecutor. As he met those hostile eyes, a faint smile trembled across his lips. While Sprott glared at him, he walked past him, out of the house.

There, in the darkness under the stars, he whispered brokenly to himself: "I didn't do it. Oh, thank God, I didn't do it."

CHAPTER 7

AS THE DAYS passed and she did not see Paul, life had become drab and empty for Lena Andersen. She felt herself slipping back into a state of depression such as she had not known since the time of the calamity which had broken up her life.

In telling Paul that she had been happy in her position at the County Arms Hotel two years ago, she had spoken nothing but the truth. Astbury was a charming old town, a resort during spring and summer, and the hotel, run by a retired army officer named Prentice and his wife, was superior. The place and the

work suited Lena—her prospects were good, she felt that she was liked by the other members of the staff.

Every other Saturday she had a half day off. It was pleasant to take a train to Wortley and to spend the afternoon looking through the big department stores. At five o'clock she had tea, all by herself, then, flushed and bright, with her few parcels, she caught the six-o'clock train to Astbury. The distance from Astbury station to the County Arms was over two miles; the road was wooded. But this did not trouble Lena.

One Saturday evening in late summer, Lena set out, with a cheerful "good evening" to the ticket collector, to walk from the station to the hotel. The road was in darkness, a stagnant, jungle darkness. Even Lena seemed to feel its strange oppression. She recollected that on the train there had been a gang of rowdies, and she kept glancing back across her shoulder. When a dry stick snapped on the path behind her she hastened her pace to a run. Suddenly an arm was thrown about her neck. She struggled fiercely, with all the strength of her young body, but uselessly. She was thrown heavily and struck her head against a stone. Mercifully she lost consciousness. There were five in the gang that attacked her.

When she came to herself, Lena, with a gashed cheek and swollen eyes, staggered to the hotel. The outrage shook the entire community, but search parties never discovered the assailants.

Major and Mrs. Prentice behaved toward Lena with exemplary kindness, but when the first shock had passed Lena could not bear the overt solicitude and covert glances. She wanted to get away. Though she told no one, she had discovered that she was to have a child.

At this time one of the guests at the hotel was a man named Dunn, a taciturn person, who came regularly to Astbury. Dunn, among other things, was a student of human nature and he studied Lena. He observed with unspoken admiration her silent, dogged courage, her desire to make the best of a dreadful business. He had the perception to realize what Lena's bruised spirit was seeking—to escape utterly from everyone who had ever known her. Without fuss, he arranged for her to get away to Wortley, to a Mrs. Hanley, an old friend whom he knew to be reliable.

Dunn was not a rich man, and he had a wife and children to support, but he arranged for Lena's confinement, which proved difficult and dangerous. The child was not normal; mercifully it

died after a few weeks. But it was months before Lena, prostrated physically and mentally, was able to go back to Mrs. Hanley's.

Dunn did not offer to find Lena a job. He wanted her to get on her own feet again. But after she was engaged at the Bonanza, he often stopped in for a cup of coffee on his way to work. He saw with interest that her only and unfailing remedy for the moods of sadness which so often weighed upon her was hard work.

This was the antidote which Lena now applied to her present melancholy. When she got home from the store each night she set to, scrubbed and polished the floor, laundered the window curtains, and worked on her two rooms until they shone.

At the week-end she looked round helplessly: there was nothing more to do. Restively she went downstairs and sat in Mrs. Hanley's parlor, listening to the latest letter from the landlady's engineer husband, Joe, whose ship was to dock in Tilbury the following Monday. But her attention wandered sadly:

"What's the matter, Lena?" Mrs. Hanley asked. "You're a bit off color. I scarcely feel like leaving you. It's a shame Joe has to stand by the ship for the refit . . . all his month's leave, too."

"I'll be all right."

"Well . . . promise me you'll take care of yourself."

"I will . . . I'll slack off tomorrow. It's my Saturday off."

But Saturday did not noticeably improve Lena's state. On the next afternoon when she had seen Mrs. Hanley off at the station, a painful loneliness descended upon her and she wandered over to the Botanical Gardens.

She set off in a direction quite opposite to that which she had taken with Paul. For an hour she fought her inclination, but at the end she entered the orangery. Inside, she drew near the slender orange tree which they had viewed together. Her heart beat heavily. Tears fell upon her hand as she turned away.

On the following night she yielded with a shamed surrender to a feeling which had swelled within her. She went to Paul's lodging in Poole Street and asked if she might see him.

"He's gone," the landlady answered shortly.

Lena's heart missed a beat. "Where did he go?"

"I've no idea. The police came inquiring for him. I had to keep his things for the rent," she added.

A thought formed in Lena's mind. "If I pay you, can I take away his things?"

The landlady reflected. The opportunity was too good to miss. Finally, she gave an acid murmur of assent and Lena took home the few worn articles of clothing. She washed and ironed the shirts, darned the socks, pressed the trousers. But when she had finished, she felt no better than she had before. More and more she became convinced that some misfortune had overtaken Paul.

Next morning, at the Bonanza, she had word of him. Nancy Wilson related an incident with great gusto to the others.

"I tell you," Nancy spoke dramatically, "you could have knocked me down with a feather. I saw him, carrying a billboard. At first I scarcely recognized him, he was that changed—thin and shabby, ragged in fact. But it was Paul all right."

It was then that the last of Lena's defenses broke. She knew that she was laying up a store of future misery, yet she could not help herself. She began, frankly, to search for Paul. She combed all the poorer streets of the city, her eyes alert for his dejected figure. She tried the station, too. But in all her eager efforts she knew only days and nights of bitter disappointment.

WHEN PAUL moved off from the Prosecutor's house, blindly traversing the silent streets, the night was cold and clear. One idea was uppermost in his mind. When he reached the canal he drew the gun from his pocket and hurled it far into the oily water. Numbly he watched the dark circles ebb in the moonlight.

At that moment the clock on the Ware steeple struck eleven.

The heavy strokes suddenly brought him back to himself. He realized that he was penniless. It became apparent that only one course was open to him. He had to sleep out. There was a place known as the Arches, two cuttings under the railroad bridge, where the homeless could sleep undisturbed. As Paul went toward this wretched spot he felt that all of his respectability was gone.

When he arrived, other unfortunates had already settled themselves for the night. Pulling up his coat collar, he sank down in the chilly shadows with his hands in his pockets and his back against a round iron pillar. It was bitterly cold. Paul drowsed in fitful snatches. Morning came in a gray and sullen haze. So cold and cramped he could scarcely rise, Paul got to his feet and stumbled off. His stomach ached for food. Out in the street all he knew was that he had to keep moving.

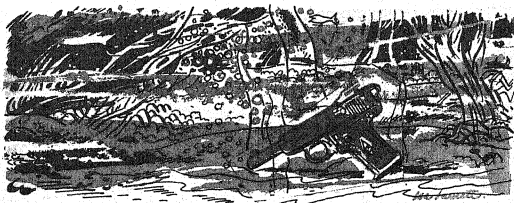
In the late afternoon he found himself on the towpath of the

branch canal. Here a bargee hailed him, and asked him to take the rope while his craft negotiated the hand-operated lock. On the barge was a motherly-looking woman frying bacon and eggs on the open cabin stove. Perhaps she had a shrewd idea of Paul's condition. When he had pulled the boat clear, she handed him a thick bacon sandwich, hot from the pan.

This sign of kindness, the glance of pity that the woman gave him, shook him painfully. He had an overwhelming desire to abandon everything, to go home to Belfast. But he fought the impulse down. He would never give up, never. Rain-drenched, he made his way back to the Arches.

And now there began for Paul a period of intense suffering. Dependent always upon the chance of a casual coin, on some days he went entirely without food. For brief intervals his memory would fail him; he would wander in a sort of stupor. Sometimes he forgot who he was. At other times he saw the people in the street merely as blurred forms and, blundering into someone, would murmur an apology before moving on. Through it all he had the notion that he was being followed and it was always the face of Jupp, the police sergeant, who watched from the shadows. Vaguely, he asked himself why he was not arrested. His clothes were soiled, his boots leaking, he had not shaved for days. His hair, uncut, fell across his collar. He wondered dizzily if it were possible to starve to death in this great and thriving city.

One evening as dusk approached he came upon a plain-looking wagon near the Corn Market, surrounded by a waiting, destitute throng. At five o'clock exactly, a flap board was let down, forming a counter. An attendant in a white apron stood behind this



counter and as each man advanced he handed him a bowl of soup and a hunk of bread. The warmth of the scalding soup flowed through Paul with a reviving glow. He ate the bread hungrily, then walked silently away.

This free canteen became the focus of Paul's existence. Every night he joined the waiting figures. The men never talked. When they had been fed they slid away, back into the shadows.

Then, after about a week, on Wednesday the usual attendant was joined by a man of about fifty, tall and erect, dressed in black, with a faint, yet kindly smile. Paul recognized him at once as Louisa's employer, Enoch Oswald, the donor of the canteen. Indeed, when Mr. Oswald removed his hat, his hair gleamed silver-white, a feature so striking it had earned him the name by which he was familiarly known. This, then, was the Silver King Canteen, of which Louisa had spoken.

He came slowly down the bread line, stopping at each man, not looking at him, never speaking, but pressing into his palm a new shilling. As Oswald stood beside him, Paul felt a deep longing, born of his own hopelessness, to enlist the aid of this truly good man who surely could not fail to help him.

The desire to reveal his identity to this man became overmastering. What a chance, he thought breathlessly. More and more he had come to realize that only through Burt could he pierce the mystery of the murder. And here, at his side, was the person who could compel the wretched woman to speak.

A kind of vertigo took hold of Paul. In his enfeebled state, the suddenness of the opportunity was too much for him. Words died in his throat. When he came to himself, his benefactor was gone. Savagely he cursed himself for his weakness, for he did not dare go openly to the Oswald home.

From the attendant he learned that the "boss" visited the canteen every Wednesday night, and he realized that in the following week his chance would come again. The silver coin remaining in his hand was like a talisman.

The following days were hard to bear. In the smoky air, Paul developed a hacking cough.

Then Wednesday came again, and hope revived in him. He went early to the Corn Market and took his place at the canteen. Suddenly he became conscious of someone standing beside him.

It was Lena Andersen.

THE CHANGE in him was so great it moved her deeply. "Why, Paul . . . it's you." She pretended the meeting was an accident. "Why don't we walk down the street together?"

After a pause he said: "This is where I have supper. I can't lose my place."

"I'm just going home," she said. "Come and eat with me."

"You mustn't get mixed up with me," he muttered.

Her gaze remained upon him. "Come, Paul . . . please."

He hesitated, torn between his weakness and his determination to await Oswald. At last he mumbled, glancing downward at his frayed trousers and cracked boots. "I can't walk through the streets with you like this. I'll come to your place later."

For a moment she considered him anxiously; then she slowly moved away.

As the attendant started serving bread and soup, it began to rain. Paul turned up the collar of his jacket and edged slowly forward, alert for Oswald's appearance. But when he reached the serving counter, Oswald had not yet arrived. Turning to the attendant, Paul said: "The boss is late tonight."

"Not coming till tomorrow," answered the other.

A cruel disappointment struck at Paul. He was counting so much on this meeting. The line forced him forward. He did not take his food. He moved off, dragging his feet along the pavement.

Lena remained across the street. At the corner she joined him.

"Come, Paul."

"In point of principle," he began vaguely. "Well, I really don't know . . ."

She was thoroughly alarmed now, and her hesitation vanished. She took his arm and led him away. He did not speak all the way to Ware Place, but she could see his lips moving from time to time, as though he were talking to himself.

On the landing outside her little living room she faced him. "You'll have supper in a minute, but first you must change."

She showed him the bathroom, turned on the hot tap, brought him soap, towels, his own shaving things and clothing. He considered the garments with a strange fixity. "Whose are these?"

"They're yours," she said quickly. "Now don't ask questions. Just get ready."

When he came out, shaved, wearing the flannel trousers and an open-necked shirt, her preparations were complete. She

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"They're yours," she said quickly. "Now don't ask questions. Just get ready."

When he came out, shaved, wearing the flannel trousers and an open-necked shirt, her preparations were complete. She

placed a chair at the table and set a bowl of soup before him.

He dipped the spoon in the thick broth and raised it shakily to his lips. When the bowl was empty, she gave him a plate of meat stew. He ate with such abstraction he did not see her watching him. He was painfully thin, but worse than that was the stiff deadness of his face. When at last he had finished he raised his head and spoke in a low voice.

"I haven't had a meal like that for weeks."

He got up as though to go.

Abruptly, she turned his chair to the fire. When he understood that it was for him he sat down, eyes bent upon the leaping flames. Occasionally his glance strayed round the room, absorbing the novelty and comfort of those four surrounding walls.

Observing him while she cleared the table, Lena set her lips determinedly. The situation, in the absence of her landlady, was difficult, yet she did not shrink from it. When he had finished washing up, she quietly went out. Ten minutes later she returned, and came over to where he still sat staring at the flames. Suddenly aware of her presence, he started. "Well . . . it's about time I went."

"Where?"

He tried to smile. "Back to the Arches, if you want to know."

"No," Lena said. "You're not going."

"But I must." He spoke with sudden agitation. "Don't you understand? If I don't get my place there in time, where am I going to sleep?"

"This is where you'll sleep," said Lena. "You can have Mrs. Hanley's spare room. And the sooner you're in bed the better."

She led the way to the room on the half landing. The red curtains were drawn, the lamp was lit, the gas fire glowed, the covers of the comfortable bed had been turned down.

He rubbed his eyes slowly with the back of his hand as though unable fully to apprehend this cheerful warmth.

"Really," he said in a dazed fashion, "supper . . . and a bed. How . . ."

"Oh, Paul," Lena murmured, in a breaking voice, "don't try to say any more . . . just go to bed and rest."

"Yes," he agreed. "That's it . . . rest."

A gust outside blew a spatter of rain against the window. Paul shivered. He entered the room and closed the door behind him.

CHAPTER 8

DAYLIGHT was glinting into the room when Paul went into the kitchen next morning. Lena was already there, placing his breakfast upon the table. She had scarcely slept all night, thinking of Paul, so near to her at last, yet at the same time reproaching herself for the liberty she had taken in her landlady's absence. Despite the difficulty of her position her instinct was to keep him here, at least until Mrs. Hanley returned. She poured out coffee, gave him a boiled egg and toast. Finally, as though taking his presence for granted, she went off to the Bonanza.

When Lena had gone Paul returned to his room. Freed of the misery of the Arches, he felt his courage return. He decided he must, after all, make an effort to see Mr. Oswald at his house.

At four o'clock he left the flat and in about an hour reached Porlock Hill. As he made to cross to Porlock Drive, he encountered a man who stared at him curiously, stopped, turned and came back. It was Jack, the waiter at the Royal Oak.

"It's you," Jack exclaimed. Then: "I have something for you."

He pulled out a battered wallet, and began to search through it.

"Ah, here we are," Jack said. "I've had it on me for the last two weeks. Louisa Burt asked me to give it to you."

Paul stretched out his hand and accepted the letter.

"We don't see you around much lately. Down on your luck?"

"I'm all right."

"Well," Jack said, "I have to be going. All the best."

He shot a final inquisitive glance at Paul, then shrugged his shoulders and made off down the street.

As the waiter disappeared from sight Paul hurried to the nearest lamppost. Holding the letter to the flickering light, he read:

Dear Mr. Smarty,

Seeing as how you thought you'd make a monkey out of me, as I've since been tipped off, I'd like for you to know for your own information that I am going to be married, proper, in church, and don't need your attentions nor promises no more. Arrangements has been made by Mr. Oswald for me and my husband to sail to New Zealand next month just like he done for my friend Ed Collins

what was here before me. So you can think on me in comfort and lucksury in a new land and I wish it makes you choke.

Yours,
Louisa Burt

Slowly, Paul lifted his eyes. Strange thoughts were rising in him. As though his mind, dormant for these past weeks, had gathered its forces, he experienced a burst of power. He reread the letter. One phrase—vital, significant and terrible—stood out as though written in letters of fire: *my friend Ed Collins . . . here before me . . .* Why had he never thought of this before?

Louisa Burt had been in service with the Oswalds—that was an innocuous fact. But this fact became exceptional when coupled with the fact that another servant in the household had been Edward Collins.

How had it come about that these two young persons, the vital witnesses in the Mathry case, had both found positions with the Oswald family? Philanthropy might explain this. Yet it was a peculiar goodheartedness which sought to marry off each of the two servants, and to ship them away to the farthest corner of the globe.

Paul had a sudden vision of Enoch Oswald—tall and craggy, the dark eyes glowing benevolently beneath their silvery brows. And then his whole consciousness seemed drawn and directed toward one extraordinary recollection—the voice of the man who had spoken with Albert Prusty on the dark stair landing that afternoon, the landlord of Ushaw Terrace.

Paul straightened in growing excitement. Impulsively he squared his shoulders and set off through the rain.

Twenty minutes later he was rattling upon the second-floor door of 52 Ushaw Terrace. The letter slot swung back and Prusty's voice came through. "Who is it? I can't see anyone."

Quickly, Paul bent down and revealed himself.

"I have asthma," complained Prusty. "Come back tomorrow."

"I must see you now . . . I must."

Grumbling, the tobacconist opened the door and admitted Paul. "What the devil do you want?" he asked.

"I won't keep you," Paul spoke hurriedly. "I only wanted to ask you . . ." His mouth suddenly was parched. "Who is the landlord of this house?"

Prusty, wheezing spasmodically, peered at his visitor.

"Why, you heard me talking to him that afternoon. It's Mr. Enoch Oswald. He owns all the Terrace. He's one of the biggest property owners in Wortley. He's kept my flat in nice repair."

"And the flat upstairs," Paul said. "He's kept that nice, too?"

"Of course he has," Prusty answered warmly. "What the devil has got into you? I can't stand here in my shirttails any longer." He began to press Paul toward the doorway.

"Just a minute. You remember you promised I could look at the flat upstairs. Well, give me the key."

Prusty's face was a study in annoyance. He seemed about to refuse, but abruptly he went into the kitchen and returned with the key. "Here!" he exclaimed curtly. "Now leave me in peace." He banged the door shut.

As Paul took the first step on the flight of stairs which led to the flat above, a better course of action flashed across his mind, and he slipped the key into his pocket. Not yet, he thought. He swung round sharply, went downstairs and hurried off.

A dreadful suspicion was forming steadily in his head. It grew with an urgency beyond his control, until it possessed him. Enoch Oswald . . . it was he who owned the flat which Mona Spurling had occupied. Since he conducted his business personally he must have seen her at least every month when he collected his rents. And if he had called upon her more often, who would question his comings and goings? He was the landlord. If Mona Spurling had been this man's mistress, who would have suspected it? If he had murdered her . . .

This was lunacy perhaps; yet his mind could not let it go, but kept piecing together the singular actions of this man. Even his public benefactions now seemed a sham, or at best a form of atonement.

Almost running now, Paul reached the center of the city, entered the library, and applied himself to its reference books.

In a local publication, *Wortley and Its Notables*, Paul came upon a full biography of the city's most prominent philanthropist:

Enoch Oswald, born 13 November 1891, only child of Saul Oswald and Martha Cleghorn . . . Educated Wortley Grammar School and Nottingham University . . . At first was intended for a professional career but owing to ill health, after two years at St. Mary's Hospital, abandoned his studies as a medical student . . .

A thrill passed over Paul as he realized the significance of these last two words. He read on:

Thereafter . . . entered his father's business at the lowest rung of the ladder, collecting weekly and monthly rents . . .

Despite recurrent attacks of indisposition . . . an interest in outdoor sports . . . in particular cycling . . . and for some months was a member of the short-lived Grasshoppers Club . . .

The biography continued, but Paul could no longer read. He pushed back his chair with a clatter and, leaving the books littered on the table, dashed from the room.

Ten minutes later he ran up the steps at Mrs. Hanley's house. Lena answered his knock. Even as she welcomed him, he said: "Lena . . . I want your help . . . now, at once."

As Paul outlined in detail what he wanted, his words were so labored, his air so unnatural, Lena wondered if he were not temporarily unbalanced. But despite the apparent absurdity of his requests, she obediently went into the kitchen and found a cardboard box, brown paper, string, and an old notebook.

She watched him as he wrapped the box in the sheet of brown paper, then tied it up. Next he turned his attention to the notebook. Selecting a clean page, he filled in the first six lines in pencil with names and addresses.

"Oh, Paul," she exclaimed. "What on earth are you doing?"

"I'll explain later. . . . You understand what you are to do?"

"I think so. But, Paul . . ." Her voice shook. "There's nothing in the package."

"Nothing . . . yet everything." He glanced at the hallway clock, which indicated a few minutes to nine. "We may as well go now. Are you ready? The whole thing won't take half an hour."

They went out together and walked in silence to the Corn Market. The Silver King Canteen was open, the long line of men was already in motion, and Paul saw that Oswald had arrived. He stood under the hanging electric light, his silver hair gleaming like a halo. Paul directed Lena toward the canteen.

As she crossed the street, the dryness in Paul's throat increased. He leaned forward, his whole body rigid. Watching, he saw Lena address the Silver King himself—he could almost follow the movements of her lips as she spoke.



"Mr. Oswald?"

The tall figure made a dignified nod of assent.

"I was asked to deliver this to you, sir," Lena passed over the package, held the receipt book open for Oswald to sign.

The pencil was now in Oswald's hand.

For Paul, the moment was prolonged beyond endurance. Then Oswald signed the book. A long, slow expulsion of breath came from Paul.

For Oswald was left-handed. Enoch Oswald, ex-student of anatomy, member of the Grasshoppers Club, collector of rents, owner of 52 Ushaw Terrace, was the man.

PAUL NEVER knew how he got back to Ware Place. When they reached No. 61, he sat down, supporting his head in both hands.

"Lena," he muttered. "There's something I must tell you."

While she listened intently, he told her everything. Although his voice was low, his manner held a seething bitterness as he concluded: "So now I know it all. And what can I do? Nothing."

Whom can I go to? Nobody. When they wouldn't listen to me before, what do you think Sprott, or Dale, or even Birley would do if I went to them with this? There's no justice. So long as people are comfortable themselves, they don't care a damn about right and wrong."

Deeply moved, Lena shook her head. "No. If people only knew about this, they wouldn't allow it. Ordinary people are honest . . . and kind."

He looked at her with disbelief.

"Does your experience prove that?"

She colored slightly, started to speak, then, as though unsure of his meaning, was silent. But in a moment she took a deep breath.

"Paul! I'm not clever. Yet I think I know what you should do," she said earnestly. "There is someone you should go to. A friend of mine."

"A friend of yours?" The words sounded so preposterous in the face of his terrible dilemma, the solution so naive, that in a fit of sheer hysteria he began to laugh. Before he knew what was happening, all the anguish in his breast flowed over in a burst of choking sobs. Lena was deeply troubled, but afraid even to lay a hand upon his shoulder. When at last the spasm was over she said: "You must get some rest now. We'll talk it over tomorrow."

"Tomorrow," he echoed in a strange, savage tone.

Alone, in the spare room he had occupied the night before, Paul sat down on the edge of the bed. His head felt hot, and he sensed vaguely that he had caught a chill. But the need for open and decisive action swelled within him and his natural balance and good sense were gone. He wanted to stand in the market place, to reach out his hands and shout of this iniquity.

At that thought, a gleam that was in part irrational lit up his eyes. Presently he went over to the desk in the corner and took out the few sheets of white shelf paper which had been used to line the drawers. He laid the paper on the floor; then, taking pen and ink, he knelt down and blocked out letters in big capitals. When he had finished, he lay down, fully dressed, upon the bed.

Despite the project that filled his mind, he slept. About seven o'clock he awoke with a start. He had the same sense of fever in his veins, and his headache was worse, but he picked up the paper sheets from the floor, rolled them into a long cylinder and, treading warily as he passed Lena's door, went out.

The Lane's Billboard Company, at this early hour, was still deserted. He squeezed through a gap in the rotting wooden fence. Inside, the double poster boards were packed in a long, open, corrugated iron shed. Paul selected the newest board he could find and, using one of the many "brush pots" standing in the shed, pasted on his printed sheets. He was about to sling on the boards when his eye was caught by a rusty heap he recognized as the iron chains once used as an advertising feature for a magician. After some searching, he found a sound chain and a serviceable padlock. Five minutes later, with the chain round his body and wearing the sandwich boards, he left the yard.

The cathedral clock was striking eight as he started toward the center of the city. People were swarming from the buses and subway exits. But only a few directed curious glances toward the young man bearing on his back the notice: MURDER: THE INNOCENT CONVICTED, and on his chest: MURDER: THE GUILTY FREE.

Paul plodded along, clutching the heavy boards with rigid hands. Since he wished to avoid the police, he kept away from the main intersections. As the forenoon advanced Paul began to feel faint, but this parade was merely the prelude to his main intention. Toward noon, a curious crowd began to follow him.

Shortly after one o'clock Paul reached Leonard Square, and here at last, under the statue of the first Lord Mayor of Wortley, he halted. He took off his boards and stood them on the pavement; then, first twisting the chain tightly round his wrist, he padlocked himself to the iron railings at the statue's base. Immediately, since it was now the lunch hour, the press of people round about Paul increased. When he turned and faced the assembly he had an audience of almost a hundred people.

With his free hand he unloosened his necktie—it seemed to be strangling him. He was conscious of no fear, only of a desperate urgency to put his case before these citizens of Wortley. Lena had said that ordinary people were kind; he could never have a better opportunity to convince them. But his head now ached frightfully; worse still, his feet felt as if they were mounted on balloons, floating dizzily through the air.

"Friends," he began. "My name is Mathry and my father is in prison."

"You'll be there yourself, chum, if you don't watch out!"

The interruption produced a laugh. Paul waited till it died out. "He's been in prison fifteen years for a crime he didn't commit."

"Ah! Tell that to the marines!" shouted a voice from the back, followed by shouts of "Shut up!" "Give him a chance!"

"I have proof that he is innocent but no one will hear me."

"We can't hear you, either, chum, unless you speak up."

"That's right. Speak up," cried others in the crowd.

Paul swallowed dryly. He realized that his voice was emerging faint and cracked. He made a superhuman effort.

"Fifteen years ago on circumstantial evidence my father was convicted of murder. But he did not commit the crime . . . he did not commit the crime . . . in proof of which . . ."

A dog was now barking so loudly, snarling and snapping at Paul's feet, that he could not make himself heard. Then the hound unexpectedly jumped up on him. Paul staggered and almost fell. A murmur grew among the mob.

"He's drunk. Paste the young soak." A banana skin flew through the air; it was the signal for a fusillade of bread crusts and apple cores from people eating lunch in the crowd.

At that moment two policemen pushed through. One was a young constable, the other was Sergeant Jupp.

"What's all this? D'you know you're creating a disturbance?"

Paul gazed at the two figures in blue, vaguely recognizing Jupp. He opened his mouth to speak but no words came out.

"He's tight, Sergeant," a sycophantic voice suggested from the front rank. "Been talkin' a lot of rot."

"You've really done it this time," Jupp said. "Come along with us." The sergeant took Paul and started to pull him through the crowd. Then he noticed the chain. His muscular neck turned dark red. "He's padlocked himself. We'll need the wagon."

The two policemen struggled angrily to free the chain, tugging Paul this way and that, while the crowd pressed and milled around them. Another policeman arrived, then hurried off, blowing his whistle. Everyone seemed to push and shout at once, the traffic was held up, there was a general commotion. This was the moment which Paul had foreseen as the climax of his resistance, the crisis when he would deliver his most impassioned address.

"Friends," he tried to shout, "I'm only asking for justice. An innocent man . . ."

But now the younger policeman had broken the padlock with



a blow of his truncheon and Paul was bundled into the police wagon. Half insensible, he scarcely knew what was happening to him until he was flung forward into a cell. His brow hit the cement floor with stunning force. The cell door clanged.

CHAPTER 9

IT WAS late afternoon when Paul again became conscious of his surroundings. Carefully he pulled himself up and sat down on the plank bed in his cell. His head ached dully and, to his surprise, he was finding it difficult to breathe; there was a cutting pain in his left side. Suddenly, as he sat there, the door opened and a man came in. Paul recognized the Chief Constable of Wortley.

Dale stood staring down at him silently. In contrast with their previous meeting his demeanor was aloof, but when he spoke his voice was quiet and restrained. "So you didn't take my advice after all. I told you to go home, but you preferred to stir up trouble. So here you are, just like I told you."

There was a pause. It seemed as though the Chief Constable were inviting Paul to speak, hoping he might commit himself through some ill-chosen word. But Paul had resolved to say nothing. His chance would come later, in court. He listened, with a queer sense of detachment, as the Chief resumed.

"And what do you think will happen to you now? You've been bothering decent citizens, pestering law officials, yes, even annoying Members of Parliament. Besides that," the voice became low, "you've been annoying me. I resent it. I resent your imputation that I've done wrong. And now you're going to suffer for it. You'll be up before the magistrate first thing tomorrow. It wouldn't surprise me if he took a serious view of the case and fixed bail pretty high—say fifty pounds. Now you'd have no means of raising fifty pounds, would you? That means you'll be remanded back here to us. Well, it's a nice cozy cell you have. I hope you like it. You might be in it for some time."

For a moment longer he looked at Paul, and then went out. But as soon as he was out of the cell Dale's expression altered. He frowned heavily. He had not been himself in there; he was like an actor who had given a bad performance and was now disgusted with himself. Yet what else could he have done? He had received

an urgent message asking him to telephone Sir Matthew; he must be in a position to state that he had seen the prisoner.

As he sat down at his desk the cloud upon his brow deepened. Hardened though he was, he did not like this affair that was back again upon his hands. He wished fervently the crazy young fool had cleared out. And again that whisper of uncertainty in his mind: *Is there something in it . . . after all?*

He jerked his head back, angrily. No, by God, there was nothing in it. He could produce a record of honesty, of integrity, that would stand the closest scrutiny. His hands were clean.

He stared at the telephone a long time before he could bring himself to dial the number. At once, Sprott came on the line.

"Hello. Sir Matthew?"

The Prosecutor's voice came back full of anger.

"What's the reason for this new blunder—this thing today in the square? You ought to be able to use a little intelligent anticipation, once in a while."

Dale tried not to lose his temper. He answered: "It wasn't easy for us, Sir Matthew. Who was to know what this young idiot was planning? However, he has gone over the score this time. He ought to get six months easily for this."

There was an odd silence. When Sir Matthew resumed, his tone was milder, full of reason. "Look here, Dale. You were near the mark when you used the word idiot. There seems no doubt now but that this young man is a psychopathic case. If so, he becomes immediately a subject for treatment in one of our mental institutions. Naturally, to certify him, one would require some data. Tell me, Adam. Is he wild in his manner?"

"Yes," Dale admitted. "You could call it wild."

"And his friends? He has no one to take care of him?"

"He has a mother and a girl in Belfast, but they seem more or less to have given him up. He's been living on the streets lately."

"Poor young man." Sprott spoke with a note of pity. "Everything points to the need for institutional care. He'll come up before the police magistrate tomorrow morning, I presume?"

"Yes," Dale answered.

"Mr. Battersby, the magistrate, is a very sound man," Sir Matthew said.

"He is," Dale said, in that same slightly unnatural tone. "If he fixes bail high enough we're sure of a remand."

"It might be well," Sprott said, "for you to explain the psychopathic aspects of the case to him, indicating that a remand would give us time to arrange a competent medical examination which, after all, would be in the young man's best interest." Then he added with great distinctness, "Make no mistake this time."

He rang off. A full minute later, and slowly, the Chief Constable hung up the receiver.

THE POLICE court opened next morning at ten o'clock. Paul was determined to speak out, to reveal everything. This time, nothing would deter him.

When he was escorted through a side door and shown his place on the prisoner's bench the court was already in session and the magistrate, Mr. Battersby, had begun to deal expertly with the usual run of misdemeanors.

The magistrate's lips were thin, molded by his office to an apparent severity, but his eyes were wise and humane. To himself, Paul said: "This man will listen to me."

Suddenly he became aware that he was the object of a steady inspection. He looked toward the public seats and immediately saw Lena. She was not alone. Beside her sat a stranger, a man of about forty, very bulky, wearing a creased tweed overcoat which had seen much service. His battered soft hat was pushed back on his head, exposing a round bald brow. His face was round and chubby. Although his expression did not alter, he raised his forefinger and laid it against his lips. It was a trivial, short-lived gesture yet somehow its significance was overpowering.

At that moment Paul's case was called. He had barely time to think as he stood up listening to the charge rattled out against him. He observed that the Chief Constable had entered the court.

"Well, what have you to say for yourself?"

The magistrate looked down at Paul. There was a short pause. The flood of words Paul had planned was ready to gush forth but somehow, for some reason which ran contrary to his will, it would not come. He hung his head and muttered: "I'm sorry, your Honor. I'd had too much to drink."

There was a short silence. Paul could see Dale straighten himself in his chair. Mr. Battersby cleared his throat.

"Aren't you ashamed to admit it?"

"Yes, your Honor."

There was a submissive note in Paul's voice which made the magistrate frown in perplexity. He examined some notes on his desk. "Can you explain the monstrous poster you displayed?"

"No, your Honor. I meant no harm. When people have had a glass . . . you know they do silly things."

Although Paul did not see it, a faint flicker twitched the lips of the man with Lena. The Chief Constable, sitting up stiffly, had half turned in his place. The magistrate glanced in his direction before putting his next question to Paul.

"Have you suffered at times from nervous attacks?"

"I don't think so, your Honor."

Again the magistrate hesitated, redirecting his gaze toward the Chief Constable. At last he seemed to make up his mind.

"Young man, in the ordinary way I should fine you two guineas and dismiss you. But from responsible representations made to me, I am of the opinion that your case may be more serious than is presently indicated. I shall therefore fix bail at fifty pounds. Can you find fifty pounds?"

"No."

"Can you name any person who will guarantee the amount?"

Paul had begun to shake his head when the stranger rose.

"I am prepared to put up bail. L. A. Dunn, of Fifteen Grant Street. I have it here, in my pocket."

"I protest," said the Chief Constable.

"Silence in court."

"Your Honor," the Chief Constable persisted, his jaw hard and grim, "I request that the amount be raised."

"Silence in court."

The magistrate waited stiffly, refusing to proceed until the Chief Constable had resumed his seat. Then, in a seriously provoked tone, he announced: "This court wishes to make it quite clear that it is not subject to influence or suggestions from any quarter whatsoever. It sees no reason to reverse its decision. Bail will therefore be accepted in the amount of fifty pounds. Next case."

Fifteen minutes later, Paul walked out, free.

When he came into the street, he saw Lena and her companion, standing together on the pavement. The big flabby man approached Paul, hands in his pockets, hat on the back of his head.

"My name's Dunn," he said. "I'm a friend of Miss Andersen's. We were waiting to take you back to Ware Place."

HALF AN HOUR later Paul was undressed and in the spare bed; the pain still stabbed his left side. Wedged in a narrow wicker chair, and wearing his hat and coat, was Dunn. Lena sat on a stool beside him.

"Feel better?" Dunn asked. Then he said, "I don't want to worry you when you're sick, son, but I understand you've something on your mind. I've heard about it from Lena, who is quite an old friend of mine. If you care to get it off your chest . . ."

Paul felt an encouragement to unburden himself of everything that lay upon his soul. He began to speak, stopping occasionally to regain his breath. When he finished there was a long silence. Dunn, who, while Paul was talking, had sunk lower and lower into the chair, slowly pried himself loose. He yawned and stretched himself and looked out of the window.

"It's raining again . . . what a climate." He yawned again and turned to Lena. "Look after him. We have five weeks before he surrenders to his bail." He leaned against the door a few seconds, rolled his bulky frame round and, without a word, went out.

DUNN—his full name, Luther Aloysius Dunn, he concealed like a crime—had started his career as a sports writer on the *Wortley Chronicle*, a daily paper of limited circulation but high reputation.

For a time he reported only minor sporting events, but soon it was recognized at the main desk that he was good: vivid in his appraisals, graphic in his descriptions. One New Year's Day, when he was only twenty-five, he was given the choicest of all sporting assignments—the local senior-league football game, which annually sends two thirds of Wortley raving mad. Besides his news story, Dunn next morning turned in a feature article, which dealt with a single incident of the game.

That afternoon James McEvoy, the editor and owner of the *Chronicle*, came wandering out of his office with the article in his hand. He sat down beside Dunn's small desk.

"What does this mean?" he inquired, tapping the article with his pince-nez. "I ask you to report a football match. You give me a story on a young halfback accidentally kicked in the head. While he's unconscious, you show me thirty thousand human beings yelling for his blood. You describe the abuse, the bottles thrown at the players, the gashed cheek suffered by the referee . . . in a word, you give me a picture of jungle sportsmanship."

"I'm sorry," Dunn mumbled. "I started the machine and that's what came out."

McEvoy stood up. "It's the worst story I've had in a twelve-month. But tomorrow it's going on the front page." While Dunn stared at him, he smiled. "I want you to come to supper at my house on Sunday evening."

That was the real beginning of Dunn's career. McEvoy sent him first to the police courts, which yielded much of that human incident so particularly suited to his pen. Then he began to move about the country and to do regular half-page feature articles signed "The Heretic." They attracted wide attention—besides evoking two libel actions which the paper successfully defended. The circulation of the *Chronicle* increased, as did the friendship between The Heretic and his editor, a relationship which was strengthened when McEvoy's sister Eva, who had for a long time bent her eyes toward Dunn, finally took possession of him. The marriage, though it did not cure Dunn of his fondness for beer and old clothes, was a steady success.

If Dunn had a motto it was *Live and let live*, yet in his own life he was always eager to redress a wrong, always ready to champion the underdog. Such inherent sentimentality made him highly vulnerable, especially to himself, for even at forty his nature was as sensitive as in his adolescence. Yet he could not endure to be regarded even remotely as a spiritual "uplifter," a reformer with a message. He was simply a newspaperman doing his job. Therefore he covered himself with a protective veneer of melancholy cynicism. It was a pose which probably deceived no one but Dunn himself. There were always tender patches of sentiment showing beneath the tough skin, but this good fellow did not see them and, like the ostrich, he felt himself secure.

When Lena had come to him after Paul's arrest, Dunn had thought he was setting out on a wild-goose chase. But after the scene in the courtroom and Paul's unmistakably authentic narrative, all his instincts told him that he had stumbled upon the greatest news story of his life.

For a week he did not once appear at the *Chronicle* offices. He was extremely occupied, and took several extensive journeys. Then, after eleven o'clock on the night of the following Thursday he came to the *Chronicle* building, locked himself in his office and began to type:

In the damp darkness of the condemned cell, in this great city of Wortley, an innocent man sat waiting to be hanged. In a few hours they would come, pinion his hands behind his back, lead him out into the cold dawn . . .

Next morning, at nine, he rolled drowsily off the office sofa and took his typescript in to McEvoy.

"Here," he said, "is the first of the new Heretic articles. Also a complete synopsis of the other nine that make up the series. Read it. I'm going out for breakfast."

When Dunn returned, the editor was at his desk. He was a neat spare man, who prided himself upon his imperturbability, but now he was staggered. "How did you get this?"

"From Mathry's son."

"Are you sure it's right?"

"Positive. I've checked everything I've written."

McEvoy rubbed his thin jaw. He was worried, and excited.

"But it goes right through the top judiciary to the Secretary of State. And how about . . . how about Mr. O.? We can't come out with that. What about libel? We'll be sued for a certainty."

"Not a chance. Don't you see how I've planned it? We save him till the end. We don't particularize. We simply say Mr. O.—or, better still, Mr. X. Then we sit tight and watch what happens. It's the biggest thing that's ever come our way. Think of it . . . here's a man, fifteen years in Stoneheath . . . and for nothing."

"They'll never admit that, never."

"We'll make them." Dunn began to walk up and down the room. "We'll show them the power of a free press. We'll make them reopen this case. For months young Mathry has been battering at their doors and they haven't opened up an inch. Why? Because they know they've made a mistake. What the hell's the good of calling ourselves a democracy if we let ourselves be dragooned by a lot of bureaucrats? Everything that was done to young Mathry suppressed his right to be heard. If we are a free country, and want to stay free, a man must be able to raise his voice. If we suppress free speech even for a second, we're done for."

"All right, all right," McEvoy said sourly. "Don't quote the whole article. We'll print it, if it ruins us. And it will!" With sudden determination he pressed the bell on his desk.

CHAPTER 10

ON THE morning after, when Dunn left Ware Place, Lena was forced to admit that Paul was worse. On each of his cheekbones there was a bright round flush. Lena felt a sharp sinking of dismay, stirred to the depths by an emotion for this young man she had thought herself incapable of experiencing.

"Paul," she said. "I think I'll fetch the doctor."

"No," he protested. "I'd rather be left alone. If you only knew . . . after everything . . . just to be left alone . . ."

She looked at him in indecision, torn between her sound common sense and a fear of outside interference. What was she to do?

Still irresolute, she lit the gas. Paul watched her with detachment. His thoughts were of Dunn. He had little hope that this newcomer would help him. Indeed, the conviction had settled upon him that it was all quite useless. He had reached the end.

In this mood of despair he thought, with unexpected pain, of Lena. Her close friendship with Dunn and the obvious understanding existing between them left little doubt in his mind as to their relationship. He now felt sure that this unobtrusive, middle-aged, married man was the father of her child. It was a conclusion which made him wince. But a compelling desire to seek further hurt drove him to speak.

"Lena, you've done a lot for me, and I'm grateful."

"It was nothing."

"I suppose you've known Dunn for some time?"

"About three years."

"He's been good to you?"

"Yes. I owe everything to him."

Paul turned his face to the wall. "Anyhow," he said, "it makes no difference. I knew already."

She started and turned pale, made as though to speak, while her eyes questioned him with a miserable smile that unconsciously implored him. But she closed her lips.

Paul suppressed a short, throaty cough. "I'm afraid I do feel rather seedy."

Now she did not hesitate. Without a word, she hurried into the hall, put on her raincoat and went out.

Doctor Kerr's surgery was the nearest, only two hundred yards along Ware Place. He was soon back in the room, giving Paul a careful examination. When he had finished, he withdrew from the bedside and looked at his watch.

"What is it, Doctor?"

"He's had a dry pleurisy—that was the pain. There's lots of fluid pressing on the lung."

He gave her a quick look, then glanced away. "I'm afraid there may be pus there. Empyema. That means hospital."

Her color changed. "You couldn't treat him here?"

"Good heavens, no. This requires a rib resection. It will take weeks. Have you a telephone in the house?"

"Yes. In the hall."

He went clattering downstairs, and she could hear him telephoning, stressing the gravity and urgency of the case. When she followed him down, he turned from the phone.

"They'll take him at St. Elizabeth's Home . . . a small place but quite good. They're sending for him now."

The ambulance came in a quarter of an hour. Ten minutes later it had gone. Lena began, from habit, to tidy up the room.

Paul's threadbare suit lay folded upon a chair beside the bed. She took it up, meaning to place it on a hanger in the cupboard. As she did so, Paul's battered old wallet dropped from the inside pocket, hit upon its edge, and spilled its contents upon the floor.

Lena bent to pick up the papers. Suddenly, among the sheets, her fingers came upon a small photograph and, instinctively, she looked at it. It was a portrait of Ella Fleming, extremely flattering—Ella had seen to that—and beneath was written a tender message. It was a souvenir Ella had presented to Paul upon his nineteenth birthday and which she had personally inserted in his wallet.

Paul had long since forgotten that he possessed the photograph. But to Lena it became immediately his most cherished treasure. In her motionless figure and fixed expression there was hidden an unfathomable anguish. At last she straightened from her kneeling position, returned the photograph to the wallet and the wallet to the pocket. She hung up the suit and went into the kitchen.

Never had she imagined this contingency—so ordinary yet so unexpected—which had exposed the enormity of her presumption. She shivered at the thought of her needless struggle with her-



self. In her stupidity, mistaking Paul's gratitude for affection, she had almost brought herself to the point of exposing the tragedy of her life. She could never tell him now. Never.

How long she stood there in anguish she did not know. All she wanted was to escape, lose herself, stamp out the memory of this supreme act of folly. She began to make her plans.

ON THE morning of February 21 the *Wortley Chronicle* carried on its front page the first of Dunn's series on the Mathry case.

Dunn walked down early to the *Chronicle* building. The newsboys were shouting the headlines. As he saw in huge letters the name MATHRY, a thrill of exultation went through him. When he reached the office, he could not resist saying to McEvoy, "I'd like to have seen Sprott's face—and Dale's—when they found what was being served for breakfast."

That day several distributors phoned in for extra hundreds of the paper. When he went out to lunch, Dunn saw people on the street, and in the restaurant he frequented, reading the article.

On the next day, about eleven o'clock in the forenoon the

telephone rang. The second article, much stronger than the first, had laid a definite charge of error against the police. When McEvoy put the receiver to his ear his eyes rested on Dunn, then he nodded meaningly and his lips silently shaped the name "Dale."

"Yes," he said. "Oh, good morning, Chief."

There was a pause. Dunn watched McEvoy's face.

"I'm sorry about that, Chief. Well, really, I don't see what you can object to. It's our job to print the facts. We've got some interesting new evidence."

A longer interval followed. McEvoy's answer was less amiable.

"We're not afraid of libel, or of any other action that may be brought against us. We believe that the public should know about this case, and we're going to see that they do know."

A final pause. The editor's eyes glinted behind his pince-nez.

"I wouldn't threaten if I were you, Dale. Try to keep your temper. You'll need all your self-control before you're finished."

McEvoy was slightly flushed as he replaced the receiver. He lit a cigarette to calm himself. "He's angry. And badly worried. I thought it best to take a strong line with him. They're up against it, and I'll bet that tomorrow or the next day we have a visit from the head man." He picked up a slip which had just been brought in to his desk. In a matter-of-fact tone he added: "It's all good for business. We printed an extra twenty thousand today. Every one of them has gone out."

On the following morning it was evident that people were beginning to talk about the case. The mail brought a sack of letters from readers of the *Chronicle*, and several other newspapers had commented upon The Heretic's series.

"It's begun." McEvoy handed the clippings over to Dunn. "But wait till they see what you say about Swann."

A young man came in. "Excuse me, sir. Sir Matthew Sprott's clerk is on the telephone. Sir Matthew would be much obliged if sometime this afternoon you would come over to see him."

McEvoy stretched his legs under the desk. "Tell Sir Matthew's clerk we're sorry, but we're extremely busy. But if Sir Matthew should care to come here, say that we'd be happy to see him."

"Very good, sir." The secretary went out.

"He'll never come," said Dunn.

"Perhaps not." McEvoy shrugged. "But for the past fifteen

years he's been frightening people; it's about time somebody frightened *him*."

The next two articles dealt, in no uncertain manner, with the suppression of the date of pregnancy, and with the peculiar manner in which the witnesses had been handled by the police.

Now, indeed, the avalanche was under way. Sacks of mail kept arriving at the *Chronicle* building, and so many telegrams poured in that McEvoy arranged for a special group of sorters. Some of the telegrams were abusive, but in the main the messages, from every corner of the country, were warmly congratulatory.

From the Reverend Foster Bowles, the sensational preacher of London, this:

WARMEST FELICITATIONS ON YOUR MAGNIFICENT CAMPAIGN. I AM PREACHING ON THE MATHRY CASE NEXT SUNDAY EVENING. GOD BLESS YOU, BROTHERS. BOWLES

"Why does he want to butt in?" asked Dunn a trifle jealously. "He's nothing but a windbag."

McEvoy shook his head. "Bowles is a man we need. He'll knock 'em dead in London." He took up the next wire. "Listen to this:

"INTENSELY APPROVE YOUR CONTINUANCE OF MATTER RAISED BY ME IN HOUSE NOVEMBER 19TH. IN VIEW IMPENDING ELECTION SHOULD APPRECIATE YOUR ACKNOWLEDGMENT MY EFFORTS. WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK JUSTICE. SINCERELY GEO. BIRLEY M.P."

"Good old George," Dunn said, unsmilingly. "He wants to climb onto the wagon."

"And to slap back at his in-laws. The Ancasters spanked him so hard he almost went off his golf game." The editor took up another slip, studied it, then passed it across the desk to Dunn. "What do you think?"

Dunn read the telegram with a frown. It was from Lloyd Bennett, the editor of the London *Tribune*.

IN VIEW GREAT INTEREST HERE MATHRY CASE OFFER RUN HERETIC ARTICLES IMMEDIATELY YOUR PRICE.

"We'd better accept," Dunn said.

"Good," McEvoy said briskly. "We'll ask a whale of a price."

"Oh, shut up, Jimmy." Dunn stood at the window. "This thing doesn't belong to either of us. Here we are, like a couple of

bookies, getting a thrill out of the big race, and the lad that really did the work is stuck in a hospital bed, with two ribs missing and a hole in his lung."

"He's still pretty sick?"

"He's bad." Dunn nodded. "But they give him a chance. If only he were well enough to read my articles! They'd do him more good than medicine."

On the following morning the London *Tribune* carried a one-page supplement containing the first three articles of the series. The next day it brought itself in line with the *Chronicle* by printing another three. The seventh article appeared simultaneously in both newspapers.

It was late that evening, when Dunn and McEvoy were preparing to go home, that a boy brought in a teletype flash.

IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS MR. DOUGLAS GIBSON (L) MEMBER FOR NEWTON, ROSE TO ASK IF, IN VIEW OF RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE PRESS AND ELSEWHERE, THE SECRETARY OF STATE WAS NOT PREPARED TO RECONSIDER HIS PREVIOUS DECISION IN RESPECT OF THE MATHRY CASE.

REPLYING, THE SECRETARY OF STATE, SIR WALTER HAMILTON, SAID HE WOULD REQUIRE NOTICE OF THE QUESTION IN WRITING.

In the office, the two men looked at each other, in electric silence. It had been a wearing day and the strain was beginning to tell on both of them.

"Notice of the question in writing," McEvoy said at last, with a queer cracked lift to his voice. "No point-blank refusal now. They want time to think. The wires to Wortley will be red hot tonight. Tomorrow we may have a visitor."

They shook hands, silently and spontaneously, then took their hats and went out.

The following day was Tuesday, and toward four o'clock a knock sounded on the door. McEvoy's secretary, looking nervous, entered the room. Directly behind him was Sir Matthew Sprott. The Prosecutor, who was extremely well groomed, had his usual expression of dignified aloofness.

There was a slight pause. "Won't you sit down," said the editor.

"Thank you." Sir Matthew took a chair. "You are difficult to get hold of these days, Mr. McEvoy. I happened to be passing

and thought I would look in. I am fortunate in finding you here also, Mr. Dunn. My remarks to some extent concern you."

There was a longer pause. "Gentlemen," the Prosecutor went on, "I must tell you that your current series of articles is somewhat embarrassing His Majesty's Government."

McEvoy and Dunn looked silently at Sprott. Behind his arrogance there was anxiety which he could not quite conceal. When he spoke again it was with unnatural heartiness.

"We are men of the world, gentlemen. I am sure we all three appreciate the difficulties of running the country in these uncertain times. And remember the elections will be upon us in a matter of three months. Now there is no question whatsoever but that His Majesty's Government is entirely sympathetic toward this matter you have raised."

"Indeed," said the editor.

"I can assure you of the fact." Sir Matthew nodded impressively. "I talked by telephone last night with the Secretary of State, and I am here to put before you a generous offer which should resolve this business and bring it to a just conclusion."

The Prosecutor moistened his lips and leaned forward.

"I am empowered to state that, if you will cease publication of these articles—which in the circumstances will be no longer necessary—Sir Walter will consent to pardon the prisoner Mathry, and release him from Stoneheath Prison." An altruistic smile seemed fixed on the Prosecutor's face.

"Well, gentlemen, do you accept?"

"No. We refuse."

Slowly, Sprott took out his handkerchief and wiped the palms of his hands. "May I ask your reasons?"

The editor never took his eyes off him. "In the first place it would be a betrayal of the *Chronicle's* integrity if we compromised at this point. In the second, one does not pardon an innocent man."

Sprott carefully restored his handkerchief to his breast pocket.

"You say 'at this point.' What is your ultimate objective?"

McEvoy answered in a level voice: "To obtain the unconditional release of the prisoner Mathry. To secure an inquiry into the circumstances of his conviction . . . and if there has been a miscarriage of justice . . . to procure damages for the horrible injury done to an innocent man."

The Prosecutor raised his eyebrows and attempted to smile, but

his face remained fixed in a grimace. With effort he got to his feet. He said coldly: "I hope, gentlemen, that you will not regret this."

He inclined his head toward each, in turn, and calmly left the room. But there was a gray look about his face, and he walked like an infirm man.

AT THE END of that week McEvoy opened the Mathry Legal Fighting Fund in the columns of the *Chronicle*. Contributions came in from all over the kingdom. The case was now a national issue. One after another, the newspapers of the great cities fell into line, demanding an impartial investigation of the facts. Writers and politicians, preachers, college professors, trade-union leaders, all joined their voices to the prevailing clamor. Rees Mathry Societies were formed; Mathry buttons were manufactured and sold all over the country. School children who had not been born when the prisoner was convicted walked in procession with banners: *Release Mathry*. In a free country, the feeling of the people may begin as a faint whisper, but it grows with unbelievable rapidity to hurricane force. Then it is useless for those in power to stand against it.

Thus it was that one wet and dreary afternoon in March, McEvoy and Dunn suddenly heard a burst of shouting in the corridor outside. A moment later the secretary came into the room holding out a teletype strip.

"It's come through, sir!" he cried. In a high voice he read out:

AT FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS THE SECRETARY OF STATE ROSE TO ANNOUNCE THAT REES MATHRY WILL BE UNCONDITIONALLY RELEASED FROM STONEHEATH PRISON ON THE LAST DAY OF THIS MONTH AND THAT A PUBLIC INQUIRY WILL BE HELD AT THE WORTLEY HIGH COURT WITHIN FOUR WEEKS' TIME. THE ANNOUNCEMENT WAS GREETED WITH PROLONGED APPLAUSE.

McEvoy turned to Dunn. He felt flat and stale, caught in the backwash of reaction.

"Well, we've won," he said. "And I'm tired. I'm going home." He began slowly to pull on his jacket. "We ought to be shaking hands and dancing the fandango. What's wrong with us?"

"Reaction, I guess. We've been pretty hard at it. But Mathry's free . . . we've brought him back to life."

"I wonder . . . I wonder how Lazarus felt when he came back from the tomb." With these cryptic words, McEvoy shook his head, then departed.

Dunn went into his own room. He meant to call the hospital to give Paul the good news at once—this was a treat which he had looked forward to for a long time. But a thought restrained him. He smiled to himself and instead left the office.

At No. 61 Ware Place he found Mrs. Hanley returned from her trip to London, busy ironing by the kitchen fire.

"Mrs. Hanley," Dunn said, "Paul's father is going to be released. That's official. I want Lena to give him the good news. Hurry now, and call her downstairs."

Mrs. Hanley looked at him.

"Lena's no longer here. When I got back last week I found her rooms empty. She left a note to say she'd gone for good."

CHAPTER 11

THE MORNING of Paul's discharge from the hospital dawned clear and soft. Long before noon, the hour when Dunn had promised to call for him, he was ready. He had been acutely ill, but the rib was healed, the lung expanded, his cough gone, although his strength had not fully returned.

As they drove toward the city, with the balmy air streaming in through the open windows, Paul experienced a burst of thrilling anticipation. This was what he had worked and suffered for all these weary months.

"I've taken rooms for you at the Windsor," Dunn broke the silence. "Your mother arrives tomorrow and you might all stay there, till the inquiry is over. The *Chronicle* will take care of the expenses. No, don't thank me. Here's thirty pounds. You'll have to buy your father some clothes and things. You can settle up if you want to when the indemnity is paid."

"What indemnity?"

Dunn gave him a sidelong look. "It looks like your father will have a claim against the government up to five thousand pounds."

"You've seen him?" Paul asked, after a silence.

"He's at the hotel. Jed Smith, one of our staff, is with him."

"You think of everything."

"I wish I did." Dunn's manner held a certain brusqueness and he changed the subject. "Have you seen Lena lately?"

"No." Paul's face altered. "Not since she got me into hospital."

"You don't know about Lena," Dunn said abruptly. "It's about time you did." And, looking straight ahead, he communicated the facts to Paul, sparing nothing.

Dazed and shaken, Paul felt his throat constrict. How he had misjudged her! What a fool—what an insufferable prig he had been! When he could speak, he said: "I must see her."

"She's gone. She gave up her job and disappeared."

"Do you know where she's gone?"

"We didn't . . . but we do now. She's working as a waitress in a cheap restaurant in Sheffield."

"You have her address?"

"If I have, it's not for publication." Dunn spoke with finality.

The taxi drew up at the Windsor, a rambling building with several turrets and a red-tiled roof. As they went through the revolving door, ascended the green-carpeted staircase and paused momentarily outside the entrance to a suite, Paul felt Dunn looking at him as though about to speak. But he could not wait. Trembling with expectation, he pushed forward, through the doorway.

In the sitting room, watched over by McEvoy's secretary, an elderly man was eating; a man of heavy and ungainly build, with a thickset torso and muscular arms. His head, partly bald, was cemented into bowed and thickened shoulders. The skin of his neck was parchment yellow, seamed with scarlike wrinkles. He was dressed in a shiny brown suit, old-fashioned in cut and grotesquely small for him.

As Paul stood arrested, with beating heart, this total stranger raised his head and, wrinkling up his brows, still chewing, stared back at him with stony, hostile eyes. For an agonizing moment Paul could not speak. A thousand times, and in a thousand different ways, he had foreseen the meeting, the quick recognition, the warm embrace—he embellished the reunion with the beloved father of his childhood. Prepared though he had been for changes brought by the years, in all his imaginings he had pictured nothing remotely resembling this devastating transformation. With an effort he advanced and held out his hand. The fingers that met his own, after a moment's hesitation, were hard as horn.

"Well, sir!" Dunn exclaimed with a note of forced heartiness. "I hope they're looking after you all right."

The man at the table did not answer. He went on chewing as though bent, grimly, on extracting all the flavor from his food.

Dunn saved the situation by turning to Smith. "You've seen to everything, Jed? You didn't let the reporters bother Mr. Mathry?"

"No, sir, I didn't. . . . I handed out our prepared statement."

"Good." There was a pause. "Well!" Dunn exclaimed, shifting his feet. "You two haven't seen each other for some time. Smith and I will look in tomorrow. Call me if you want anything."

A wave of actual fright went over Paul. He would have given anything to detain the two others, but he saw that they were anxious to go.

When the door closed behind them he stood for a minute, then he sat down at the table. The stranger, this Rees Mathry who was his father, was still eating, bent close over his plate, and from time to time sending out that masklike glance. Paul could bear it no longer. Almost incoherently, he began.

"I can't tell you how glad I am . . . to see you again, Father. It means a lot to me. Of course, after all these years . . . it's difficult for us both. There's so much to say. But the first thing is to get you some decent clothes. When you finish your lunch . . ."

His remarks trailed off into silence. He was both startled and relieved when the other spoke. "Have you any brass?"

Although chilled by the crudeness of the question, Paul responded willingly. "Enough to go on with."

"I couldn't get a stiver out of that Dunn." Then, as though thinking aloud, "But I'm going to get money. I'll make them pay for what they've done to me."

The voice itself was rough, but worse than the coarseness was the frightful bitterness which pervaded it. Paul felt a further sinking of his heart. "Have you a cigarette?" his father went on.

"I'm sorry. I've been off smoking for a bit."

Mathry studied him, beneath those masklike brows. Then, reluctantly, he produced a pack of cigarettes which Paul recognized as the brand used by Dunn. Selecting one, he cowered suddenly, as though to escape observation, and lit it. With the cigarette concealed in the cup of his hand he smoked rapidly, secretly. As Paul watched the intent brooding face he saw for the first time, almost with horror, its stony quality. The mouth

especially was hard as flint, and shut like a trap beneath the long upper lip. Suddenly, and without warning, Mathry killed the glowing end of his cigarette and placed the stub in his waistcoat pocket. Paul stood up. He felt sick at heart.

"We'd better go out now . . . and do your shopping."

"Yes," said Mathry. "I want some good duds."

They went out to Leonard Street, where they entered Dron's, one of the largest outfitters in the city. The afternoon, as it progressed, became a nightmare to Paul. His father's uncouth appearance caused people to stare after them, and his rough manner on one occasion brought the young woman who served them to the verge of tears. Furthermore he insisted on having a suit of checked material, made for a much younger man; the shirt he chose was of vivid artificial silk, the tie a loud yellow.

When they got back to the Windsor at six o'clock Paul sank into a chair in the sitting room while Mathry took his parcels into his bedroom. He came back arrayed in his new garments and walking with an air of dogged vanity.

"I wish some of those swine could see me now. We ought to go out, have a spread and take in a theater."

"We've only just come in," Paul said quickly. "We'll have dinner up here tonight."

Mathry looked at him, wrinkling the parchment brow.

"We'll have some whisky?"

"Yes, of course," Paul agreed.

Mathry stretched himself on the couch and opened the evening paper which he had made Paul purchase on the way back. "I ought to be in there," he said. "They took photographs. I'm going to make them pay me for everything they print."

Paul ordered dinner and a bottle of whisky. He could scarcely touch it. Mathry, on the other hand, ate with voracity. When he had finished he poured himself a stiff glass of whisky. He carried this and the bottle across the room and sat in a high-backed chair, erect, in absolute silence, staring straight ahead at nothing, with a lowering intensity which was terrifying. From time to time he replenished his glass. He seemed utterly oblivious of Paul's presence.

As the silence continued, Paul gazed at the brooding figure of his father. How could this be the loving man who had led him by the hand to sail paper boats, taken the trouble to amuse him by sketching? What frightful process of brutalization had

brought him to this state? As Paul strove to envisage all the grinding miseries of these fifteen years, a faint spark of pity strove to kindle itself within his breast. But it was stifled instantly by the awful reality of the physical presence across the room.

Suddenly Mathry glanced at the clock.

"Nine o'clock," he said. "They're all on their nice plank beds now. They've been in the quarry, sweating their guts out, in the rain. There was watery soup for supper . . . lucky if they got a bit of gristle in it . . . and spuds . . . spuds that taste like soap.

"Some of them have smashed their fingers in the quarry, some have blisters and backache . . . they all have the rheumatism that goes with the infernal mist. But that don't matter beside what they're thinking. They're all thinking about the outside . . . trying to remember what it was like over the high walls.

"But maybe some of 'em are not in their nice little cells. Suppose they did something wrong. Then they're in solitary. Not even room to turn round . . . just two steps and you bang your skull against the concrete. That's where you really start to think . . . to wonder who you are . . . and what you've done to get there. That's where you tell yourself you'll make somebody pay for what you've suffered . . . grab everything for yourself . . . if only the walls split open. Well, by God, they split open for me. So now you can guess what I'm out to do."

He stood up and, without saying good night, without even looking at Paul, went out of the room. His heavy tread was audible as he tramped along the corridor to his bedroom.

NEXT DAY, in the clear morning light, the outlook seemed less somber, and Paul was ready to face his difficulties with new determination. His mother was due to arrive from Belfast at eleven o'clock, and he felt hopeful that this additional support would improve the situation: time, kindness and affection could regenerate the most hardened heart. He took breakfast alone. Mathry was still asleep, and Paul decided not to rouse him.

When he reached the station, the express was just drawing up. And there, leaving the foremost compartment, was a little group—his mother, Ella, and Emmanuel Fleming.

Paul was startled—he had not expected to see the pastor and his daughter. Indeed they had been so long absent from his thoughts that he felt embarrassed and ill at ease. Fleming had

his arm upraised and Ella was fluttering her small white handkerchief. In a few moments they had passed the barrier and were greeting him with enthusiasm. His mother's eyes were moist, Ella seemed loath to remove her gloved hand from his, while the minister smiled at him with understanding and approval.

As they set off along the street to the tram stop, Fleming and his mother led the way while Paul followed with Ella.

An excited color tinged her wax-clear complexion; her short glossy hair had been recently curled. She wore a new dove-gray costume and a neat little gray hat beneath which her eyes gleamed. She began immediately in a confident tone, taking his arm.

"Well, I must say, Paul," she said, "we owe you an abject apology. Of course we thought you were just ruining your splendid career and blighting your life all for nothing, and we felt if we helped or encouraged you it would only make things worse. . . . And then, look what happened. When the news came out, I nearly fainted. But I don't want to talk about me, though I suffered, too, in my own quiet way. It's your triumph, Paul, and I want you to enjoy it to the full. Naturally prayer must have been responsible, too, we both know that, and never a night passed but I made supplication for you to the Throne." Her gaze grew fonder. "It's so wonderful, Paul: we're together again, with all our future before us. But of course in the joy of our reunion we mustn't forget your father. The poor, poor man. My heart just bleeds for him."

She broke off as they entered the tramcar. Paul bit his lip at this possessive monologue. Was he really as deeply committed to her as she made out? He thought of Lena and his heart sank.

When the four of them had found seats, Paul realized that it was now his duty to warn them of the change in Mathry. Only the pastor, staring out of the window as Ella resumed her flow of conversation, seemed to harbor a secret doubt. The two women were, as he himself had been, obviously unprepared. Yet, as the tram lumbered forward, Paul remained stiffly silent. There was in Ella's facile enthusiasm, even in the primly nervous anticipation that he discerned in his mother—who was also dressed in her best, with even a touch of matronly coquetry—a quality which, in some peculiar fashion, antagonized him and aligned him, not on their side, but with that dulled and brutalized man who awaited them at the hotel.

When they dismounted at the Windsor, he led the way into

the hotel without a word. Upstairs, he threw open the door of the sitting room and ushered them in.

Mathry had finished his breakfast and was smoking a cigarette. Clad in trousers and braces, his shirt unfastened at the neck, he sat at the table, which was still covered with soiled dishes. His expression was more inscrutable than ever. Watching the newcomers, he turned to Paul as the one person he recognized and tolerated. "What do they want?" he said.

Paul sought for an answer. "They want to be with you, Father."

"I don't want to be with them. They left me to rot for years. And now I'm out, they crawl back to see what they can get."

The pastor took a step forward. He was pale, yet he seemed less discomposed than the others by this reception. In a low persuasive voice he said: "You have every reason to reproach us. We can only throw ourselves upon your mercy and ask you to forgive us."

Mathry bent his forbidding gaze on Fleming.

"You haven't changed. . . . I remember you quite well. I want none of your mealy-mouthed slush. Forgiveness!" His chapped lips drew back in a kind of snarl. "Did anyone forgive me?"

"I know you've suffered," Fleming said weakly. "You've suffered horribly. We want to help you to re-establish yourself in the bosom of your own family."

"I have other ideas." Mathry's face assumed a dogged insistence. "I'm not done yet. I'm going to enjoy my life. They've had their fun with me. Now it's my turn."

Drawn up short, Fleming gazed almost helplessly at Paul's mother, who, with parted lips and an aghast expression, was staring at Mathry. So far she had not said a word. But now, compelled perhaps by an emotion from a distant past, she gave a cry and held out her hands. "Rees—let us try to start over again."

His look repulsed her even before she advanced.

"None of that." He struck the table with his fist. "It's all finished between us. You were always sniveling, whining after me to go to meeting when all I wanted was to have my pals in for a glass of beer. I wouldn't come near you now if you were the last woman in the world."

She sank down on a chair, her head bowed, tears streaming from her eyes. Ella knelt beside her and whimpered in sympathy. Mr. Fleming stood silent. Paul glanced at the bent figure

of his mother. But he did not move toward her—it was almost as though once again he felt drawn, in sympathy, to his father.

Mathry got heavily to his feet and swept past them. The door slammed behind him, leaving nothing but the sound of sobs.

"Oh dear, oh dear," Paul's mother moaned. "I wish I were dead. We should never have come. We must leave at once."

Pastor Fleming, at the window, turned slowly.

"No," he said. "We must remain for the inquiry. We failed him once. We cannot do so again."

CHAPTER 12

AT TEN o'clock on Monday the 25th of March, the High Court of Justiciary was filled to suffocation. In the public gallery the spectators were wedged together; the well of the court was equally congested. In the center sat the Attorney General, with Sir Matthew Sprott, Lord Oman and other high officials of the Crown. Immediately behind were counsel for the appellant, headed by Mr. Nigel Grahame. Then came Paul and his mother, Ella and Pastor Fleming, Dunn, McEvoy and a number of their friends. On the front bench, where, against the wishes of his counsel, he had chosen to sit, biting at his lip as he broodingly surveyed the scene, was Rees Mathry.

Suddenly the buzz of conversation was stilled and a door swung open. Everyone stood as the five lords of appeal, led by the Lord Chief Justice, filed into court, imposing in their flowing robes. A moment later a voice was heard: "Call the appeal of Rees Mathry against His Majesty's Crown."

Cramped and tense in his place, Paul drew a sharp, painful breath. He could scarcely believe that now, at last, the inquiry had begun. Nigel Grahame, his father's counsel, rose quietly. Tall, erect and perfectly composed, the young lawyer addressed himself to the bench. His tone was almost conversational.

"My lords, on December 15, 1921, and subsequent days, Rees Mathry, your petitioner, was tried at the Wortley Assizes on an indictment at the instance of Mr. Matthew Sprott, His Majesty's Prosecuting Counsel, the charge being that he did assault one Mona Spurling and did murder her with a razor. . . ."

Surreptitiously, as Grahame proceeded, Paul observed the three

agents of the law who sat near to him. Chief Constable Dale's profile was stolidly impassive; Oman wore a haughty and absent air; Sprott was flushed but his look was firm. From these Paul's glance turned to the lonely and ungainly figure of his father, suffering again the ordeal of a public court.

"The petitioner," Grahame was ending, "desires now to prove that he is innocent and that his conviction constituted a grave miscarriage of justice."

Having completed his reading of the petition, Grahame paused a moment and then began his opening address. He proceeded to analyze the facts in the trial and conviction of Rees Mathry. Familiar though he was with these searing events, Paul could not restrain a hot surge of feeling as, point by point, Grahame calmly and logically set down the details of the circumstantial evidence which had enmeshed his father.

The masterly speech lasted, with an interval for lunch, for nearly four hours. And, at the end of it, showing no signs of fatigue, Grahame tranquilly pushed on. He bowed to the bench, and indicated that he desired to call his witnesses.

"My lords," he declared, "I propose in the first instance to call the appellant himself. At the trial, because of the unparalleled attack upon his character made by the counsel for the Crown, Rees Mathry was not afforded full opportunity to defend himself. But he will now give evidence denying all knowledge of the crime, and answering any of the questions relative to the charge."

Immediately, the Attorney General rose in protest.

"My lords, I am anxious to assist legitimate inquiry in this appeal. But there must be no attempt to retry the case. I strenuously oppose the motion that the accused be allowed to give evidence."

Their lordships, upon the bench, bent their heads in consultation. Presently the Lord Chief Justice announced their decision: "The court is of the opinion that the appellant's evidence would amount to no more than a repetition of his plea of not guilty. The court therefore is not prepared to allow his evidence to be received."

Leaning forward, Mathry had followed his lordship's words with increasing agitation. And now he jumped suddenly to his feet, his heavy figure trembling all over. To Paul's horror he shook his fist at the bench and shouted, in hoarse tones: "It's not right. I ought to have my say. How I was done down, how they



treated me." His voice rose to the breaking point. "I want to be heard. I want justice . . . justice."

Gesticulating wildly, Mathry was at last forced back into his seat by Grahame and several attendants of the court who had hastened to restrain him. For some minutes there was a great commotion, followed by absolute silence. With great severity, the Lord Chief Justice bent his brows upon Mathry.

"I must advise the appellant that such conduct is not calculated to improve this court's opinion of his case. If it is repeated, I must warn him that he will be held in contempt of court."

Grahame, back in his place, deftly interposed: "My lords, on behalf of the petitioner, I offer sincere apologies to the court for this outburst. And now, with your lordships' permission, I will call my first witness. You will recollect, my lords, from your reading of the case, that Dr. Tuke, the physician who was first to view the murdered woman, was not summoned to give

evidence at the trial. My lords, in all your experience, you cannot name one other case in which the doctor who first examined the body was not asked to testify. Why was this crucial witness ignored? Dr. Tuke is now dead, but his widow is here today to answer that very pertinent question."

A ripple went through the court as Mrs. Tuke's name was called, and a moment later she went into the witness box, a staid, elderly figure in black, a woman of unmistakable honesty and respectability. She took the oath, and Grahame began: "Mrs. Tuke, did your husband at any time express surprise to you that he had not been called as a witness at the trial?"

"Indeed he did. He said it was most remarkable. He said the Prosecutor did not regard his opinion as relevant to the case."

Again a wave of interest went through the court and for the first time the attention of the spectators was directed toward Sir Matthew Sprott.

"Tell us, Mrs. Tuke," Grahame resumed, "in your own words, the views which your husband expressed to you upon the subject."

"Well, sir," the witness began, "Dr. Tuke always believed that the murder could not have been committed by a razor. In his opinion the instrument was quite different—sharp-pointed and piercing, more like a surgeon's scalpel. You see, sir, he found a deep penetrating wound at the right side of the neck, then a great slash, tapering away to the left ear."

"So he concluded that a pointed, thin-bladed weapon had first been thrust deeply into the great vessels of the neck, before the secondary slash?"

"Yes, sir."

"And a razor, with its round, blunt end, could never have achieved such a result?"

"That is just what he said, sir. He also believed from the disposition of the wounds, and the way the blood had splashed the rug, that the knife had been wielded by a left-handed man."

"A left-handed man," repeated Grahame with peculiar emphasis, and he gazed at his witness with a hint of severity. "Your recollection of that is quite clear and distinct?"

"Quite clear."

"That will be all, Mrs. Tuke. I ask my next witness to appear."

The name of Professor Valentine was called out in court.

The individual who stepped forward was a short and officious

man of about fifty. From his high forehead rose a bush of black hair which, worn long at the back, gave him the air of a second-rate impresario. After the oath Grahame began mildly, "Mr. Valentine, you have, I understand, some knowledge of handwriting?"

"I am a professor of paleography," Valentine stated with dignity. "I think I may say that my reputation as an expert is universally known."

"Excellent. At the trial I believe you testified that the note of assignation found in the murdered woman's flat had been written by Rees Mathry?"

"I did, sir."

"Would you tell us, Professor Valentine, how you arrived at such a very positive conclusion?"

"By the use of a magnifying glass, sir, upon the document in question and by enlarged photographs of the calligraphy, which I compared with the post card admittedly written by the prisoner. I was able to reach the definite conclusion that the note had been written, in a disguised manner, by Mathry."

"In what manner disguised?"

"By taking the pen in the left hand."

"Ah! So the note of assignation was written left-handed?"

"Indubitably. And by the prisoner, Mathry."

"And by Mathry." Grahame smiled agreeably. "In your opinion there were three distinct points. First, that the writing was left-handed, secondly, that it was disguised, thirdly, that it was by Mathry. Would you tell us which of these findings you base upon fact and which upon personal deduction?"

"The merest novice, sir, could tell from the slope and configuration of the letters that the note in question was written disguised and left-handed. The third point, however, involved skilled technical knowledge of a high order . . . one might even use the word intuition . . . a sort of sixth sense which enables the expert to recognize a specific calligraphy among a host of others."

"Thank you, Professor," Grahame said quietly. "That is precisely what I wished to know. In point of fact, then, you affirm that the note was written disguised and left-handed. But with your sixth sense, your intuition, you opine that it was written by Mathry. That is all."

The Professor opened his mouth as though about to speak but seemed to judge it wiser to say nothing. As he stepped down, Mr.

Grahame turned to the bench. "My lords, with your permission I will call Police Surgeon Dobson."

Again the Attorney General was swiftly on his feet.

"My lords, I object. The Police Surgeon was heard in full at the trial. Further evidence from him is not admissible."

"Unless," Grahame interposed, "it arises out of fresh facts."

A motion of assent was made, following which a spry dark-haired man with an athletic figure and an agreeable, virile face took his place in the box.

"Dr. Dobson," Grahame began, in his most winning manner, "you have heard the theories of Dr. Tuke relating to the murdered woman's injuries. What do you think of them?"

"Rubbish." The word, uttered with a disarming smile, sent a murmur of amusement through the gallery. Paul caught his breath sharply. He doubted the wisdom of calling the Police Surgeon and feared that Grahame would fare badly against this confident witness. But Grahame went on:

"Perhaps in general you are opposed to theories."

"When I find a woman with her head virtually severed from her body I find little need for theoretical speculation."

"I see. You conclude immediately that the lethal weapon was the obvious one—a razor."

"I did not once mention the word razor."

"But the prosecution produced a razor as the fatal instrument."

"That is not my department."

"Then let us return, if we may, to your department. What was your own conclusion, if any, in respect to the weapon?"

"That the injuries were occasioned by a very sharp instrument."

The surgeon was growing angry. Grahame smiled at him gently.

"So, as Dr. Tuke contended, the murderer could have used a thin, sharp blade, such as a scalpel."

Annoyance and honesty contended openly in Dobson's face.

"Yes," he declared at length, "I suppose he could. Provided he had some knowledge of anatomy."

"Some knowledge of anatomy." Grahame gave the phrase a thrilling significance. "Thank you, Doctor . . . very much. Now, you performed an autopsy upon the murdered woman during which you found that she was pregnant."

"I stated the fact in my report."

"Did you state the term of pregnancy?"

"Of course," the Police Surgeon answered warmly. "Are you suggesting that I was remiss in my duty?"

"Far from it, Doctor. I am convinced of your absolute integrity. How long had the murdered woman been pregnant?"

"Three months."

"You are sure?"

"Of course."

"Thank you, Doctor. That will be all." Grahame, with a pleasant smile, dismissed Dobson, then turned to the bench.

"My lords, with your consent I will call my fourth witness."

A weedy little man came forward, thin-faced, bald, dressed in a checked suit too large for his wizened frame.

"What is your name?"

"Harry Rocca."

"Your present occupation?"

"Stableman . . . at the Nottingham Racecourse."

"It was you who, fifteen years ago, disclosed to the police the false alibi which Mathry attempted to arrange?"

"Yes."

"Where did you first meet Mathry?"

"In the Sherwood Poolrooms . . . around January 1921."

"And later on you introduced him to the Spurling woman?"

"That's right, sir."

"Can you recollect precisely when this introduction took place?"

"Very well. It was the day of the big July Handicap at Catterick—run the fourteenth of July."

"Did you mention the exact day to the authorities?"

Rocca lowered his head. "I don't remember."

"In the light of the medical evidence, this date, which showed that Mathry had known Spurling for only seven weeks, was of the utmost significance. Were you not questioned about it?"

Rocca shook his head. "I don't remember. They wasn't much interested . . . didn't seem to think it was important."

"I see. It was not important to prove that the most damning link in all the evidence against Mathry was an absolute impossibility. That will do. Thank you."

As Rocca left the box, Grahame gazed mildly toward the bench. "My lords, my next witness is Louisa Burt."

She came in jauntily enough and, having taken her place on

the stand, preened herself, then gazed round the court. When she had taken the oath Grahame addressed her in his most courteous manner: "You are Louisa Burt?"

"Yes, sir. At least I was." She bridled consciously. "As you probably know, I just recently got married. I must say it was a surprise when we was detained at the boat. But I'm only too willing to oblige, sir."

"You realize that the evidence you gave at the trial was of vital importance?"

"I done my best, sir," Burt answered modestly.

"Now, the night of the murder was, I believe, dark and rainy."

"Yes, sir. I remember it like it was yesterday."

"And the fugitive who came from Fifty-two Ushaw Terrace was running very fast."

"He was indeed, sir."

"So fast, indeed, that he flashed past you in a second."

"I suppose he did, sir." Burt spoke thoughtfully.

"Yet you obtained a very clear and complete picture of this man. He wore, you said, a fawn waterproof, a checked cap and brown boots. Tell us now, how, in an instant and in the darkness, did you secure so comprehensive a description?"

"Well, you see, sir," Burt answered with confidence, "he run under the street lamp. And the light shone full on him."

"The time being twenty minutes to eight."

"Exactly, sir. I left the laundry with my friend at half past seven, and it's less than a ten-minute walk to Number Fifty-two."

"So you are absolutely certain of the time?"

"I'll take my oath, sir. In fact I've already took it."

"In that case, how would you have observed the fugitive by lamplight? In that district, at that time of year, the street lighting was not turned on until eight p.m."

For the first time Burt appeared taken aback and, in a furtive fashion, her eyes sought out Dale, who sat in the well of the court deliberately averting his gaze from the witness box.

"It seemed like the lamp was on, sir," Burt asserted, at last. "I took it all in very quick, it just burned itself into my brain."

"Then why does this burned-in description differ materially from the final deposition which you signed after repeated questionings at the police station? If I am right, you said the running man was clean-shaven."

"Yes," Burt replied after some delay.

"You made that outright statement, and it was published in the press." Grahame paused. "Yet Mathry, the man whom you identified at Liverpool as being the fugitive, had a mustache which, in fact, he had worn for the previous six years."

"I can't help that," Burt retorted sullenly. "On second thoughts it seemed like he had the mustache. I told you I done my best."

"Of course," replied Grahame soothingly. "That is becoming increasingly evident. Well, we will leave those trifles of the unlit lamp, the mustache, the altered description of the clothing, and pass to an even more singular matter."

Burt's composure had gone. She kept searching for some encouragement from Sprott, then from the Chief Constable. Both grimly refused to look at her. Suddenly she saw Paul. Her eyes widened and a livid color spread over her pale, plump cheeks.

"It is," Grahame continued, "the question of your association with Edward Collins. Were you very friendly with Edward?"

Burt burst into tears. "I feel bad," she whimpered. "I can't go on. I need to lie down. I'm just recently a bride."

The Lord Chief Justice frowned, suppressing the faint titter of the court. "Are you ill?" he queried.

"Yes, sir, yes, your Lordship, I must have a rest."

"My lords," Grahame said reasonably, "with your permission, I am quite agreeable that the witness should be accorded some respite. But I must recall her thereafter."

The judges consented. As Burt was assisted from the witness stand, the courtroom clock showed five minutes to four. The Lord Chief Justice adjourned the inquiry until the following morning.

CHAPTER 13

SPROTT made his way swiftly from the court by the private side entrance. As he hurried across the pavement toward his car, his mood was lightened by a throb of pleasure when he perceived that his wife was in the back seat. He flung himself in, lay back on the soft gray upholstery and took her hand.

The day had been torture. Moreover, he knew there was worse to come. He said: "It was like you to come for me, Catharine. I knew I could depend on you."

She made no answer, but presently she withdrew her hand.

"It went not badly, considering." He spoke to reassure himself, as well as her. "Of course, Grahame was sensational—as we expected. He slung muck at us all—the cheap hound."

"Don't, Matt."

He bent toward her in surprise. "What's the matter?"

"I don't think Mr. Grahame is cheap. I think he's honest and sincere."

Sprott's florid face grew brick red. "You wouldn't say that if you had heard him today."

"I did hear him." She turned from the window and, for the first time, looked at him with pained and shadowed eyes. "I was in the gallery. I had to go. I went to support you, to hear you cleared of those vile insinuations. And instead . . ."

He stared at her. This was the last thing he had wanted. "You should have kept away. That court was no place for a woman."

There was a pause. He curbed his temper. "Well, never mind." He attempted to regain possession of her hand. "They'll throw some kind of sop to this Mathry and then it will all be over."

"Will it, Matt?" she answered, with a strange apathy.

The tone of her voice struck him like a blow. At that moment they drew up at their home. Catharine hurried into the house.

He hurried in after her and caught up with her in the hall. "Wait, Catharine," he cried. "What the devil's wrong with you?"

She answered brokenly: "Can't you guess?"

"No, I can't."

She gazed at him like a wounded bird.

"All these years when I overheard people running you down I refused to believe it. I trusted you. But today, in court, Grahame was telling the truth, Matt. You sentenced a man to worse than death simply to get yourself on." She passed her thin hand in anguish over her forehead. "Oh, how could you? It was horrible, just to look at that poor wretch and see what he had suffered."

"Catharine," he exclaimed, coming nearer to her, "you don't know what you are saying. It's my duty to secure a conviction."

"No, no," she cried. "It's your duty to see justice done. Yet you employed every means to entrap and condemn Mathry."

"Don't be hysterical," he said harshly.

Although her lips trembled, she gave him a long intense look.

"Matt, have you not always known that he is innocent?"

At that word "innocent," which he had heard so often from the dock, but which, now, uttered by his wife, assumed a terrifying significance, emotion flooded over him, a strange commingling of anger, desire, and an abject longing to lay his head upon her breast and weep. He came close to her but she recoiled.

"Don't touch me."

The exclamation froze him. He watched her as she turned and went slowly up the stairs.

After a solitary dinner—his daughters had been sent away to visit during the publicity of the trial—he mixed himself a large whisky and water in his study. The turmoil in his mind was something he had never experienced before. All that he had sought for and achieved, his rich belongings, his finely bound books, his beautiful pictures, seemed suddenly to have no meaning. He could think of nothing but Catharine. He strained his ears for some sound of her upstairs.

He took another drink and gradually, as his senses warmed, things looked less dark. Catharine was a highly strung creature, but she would get over this unlucky business. More than ever he had need of her. His pulse beat faster as he dwelt upon her gentle, loving favors.

It was now eleven o'clock and the house was completely still. He got up, switched off the lights and softly tiptoed upstairs.

Outside his wife's bedroom he paused, desire and a craving for sympathy welling within him. He placed his fingers on the handle of the door and gently turned it. It was locked. Dismayed, he called to Catharine in a low voice . . . then louder. There was no answer. Again he tried and again, twisting the handle violently, with his shoulder pressed against the panels. But the door was firmly secured. For a moment his thick body drew together in a paroxysm, as though to batter down the barrier, then, gradually, grew slack. The Prosecutor swung round and groped his way to his own room.

THAT SAME evening a singular compulsion grew on Paul. His mother and Pastor Fleming had gone to eight-o'clock service in the nearby Gospel Hall; Ella, in a fit of sulks, had retired to her room; Mathry was already in bed. Paul sat alone in the living room at the Windsor, prey to a strange premonition he could not dismiss.

Several newspapers lay scattered at his feet. Rumors of Oswald's involvement had multiplied rapidly and now the headlines proclaimed the latest sensation of the Mathry case. From his chair the black banner type was clearly visible: MYSTERIOUS DISAPPEARANCE OF ENOCH OSWALD.

As once again he read these words, the impulse to act took stronger shape and form, until it proved irresistible. It was not yet nine o'clock. He rose from his chair, put on his coat and hat and went out of the hotel.

He turned his steps in the direction of Eldon and Ushaw Terrace. Presently he entered No. 52, and mounted to the top landing, passing Prusty's flat. He knocked on the door of the fatal apartment; there was no answer. Taking from his pocket the key which Prusty had given him, he inserted it in the lock. It turned easily. Then he was inside and had closed the door behind him. In a firm voice he said: "Is anyone there?"

There was no reply.

No lights were showing. He stood motionless in the tenebrous hallway, conscious of the cold stillness of the unused flat. He found a box of matches in his coat and cautiously struck a flare. As the match flickered he saw the open door leading to the living room. He went in.

Once more he called: "Is anyone there?"

Again there was no answer. Perhaps, after all, he was alone in the flat.

He lit the gas in the pink frosted globe. Up until that moment he had been moderately calm, but now all at once he caught his breath. From the bedroom came the creaking of a board—a sound which, though faint, rang through the muted house like the crack of doom. A moment later, he heard a dragging tread upon the floor. Although he had expected this, Paul had to fight down a desire to turn and bolt as the bedroom door opened. Enoch Oswald appeared, dressed in his usual sober black, but disheveled, with his tie undone, his hair streaked upon his brow, his eyes hollow and heavy. Like an apparition he came slowly toward Paul, stared deeply into his face.

"It is you," he said at last. His voice was deep and weary. "I felt you might visit me. I knew you had the key." He lowered himself into a chair and, with a measured gesture, indicated the place beside him. "Tell me . . . why have you come?"

Paul felt his mouth go dry. How could he explain what was in his mind? He strove to keep his voice even.

"I guessed you'd be here. I've come . . . to tell you to clear out . . . to get away at once."

Oswald's eyes, which had been blankly surveying the room, suddenly came to rest upon Paul.

"You surprise me, young man. I fancied you were not particularly . . . well disposed . . . toward me."

"I feel different now," Paul answered in a low voice. "What I've been through, what I saw in court today . . . has changed my ideas. There's been enough suffering over this case. They gave my father fifteen years of misery. What good will it do if they start all over again on you? You have twenty-four hours to leave the country. At least it gives you a chance."

"A chance," Oswald echoed in an indescribable tone. He was in a kind of rapture, his long upper lip quivering. "Young man," he cried suddenly, in a fervent voice, "there is still hope for humanity. Oh, now I am sure . . . sure that my Redeemer liveth!"

Unable to restrain himself, he got to his feet and began rapidly to pace the room, cracking the joints of his fingers, lifting up his head from time to time, as though in thanksgiving. At last he resumed his seat, and gripped Paul tightly by the arm.

"My dear young man, besides my gratitude, I owe you an explanation. It is only your due that you should hear the whole tragic story."

Still holding Paul in that iron grasp, he stared into his eyes and, after a silence, hoarsely began, in a manner so archaic, so scriptural in tone, that it crossed the borderline of reason.

"I have all my life endured a visitation from Above. From my earliest childhood, I have been an epileptic." He paused to draw a deep sigh, then went on: "I was brought up in a sheltered manner, and educated by a tutor. But since my tastes lay toward medicine I was sent at the age of nineteen to the University, and thence to St. Mary's Hospital. Alas, my disorder finally cut short my medical studies. I was forced to return home. Then, gradually, once I had passed my twenty-fifth year, my nervous attacks diminished and almost disappeared, and I was able to take my place in my father's business. I became engaged to a lady of fine character."

Oswald paused, and another sigh racked his chest. "During

this period, I became acquainted with the woman Spurling when, by sheer chance, I went to a florist's to order flowers for my fiancée. I shall not dwell upon the insidious manner in which our liaison developed. I accept full blame for my weakness and sinfulness. Nevertheless, I can affirm that in my downfall I received every assistance from Mona.

"She exacted everything from me—clothes, jewelry, money, an apartment—and when I offered to make full provision for her and the child she was expecting, she refused, in the most offensive terms. Marriage alone would satisfy her.

"At that precise moment my father died. Driven frantic by grief and worry, I experienced a sharp recurrence of my epileptic seizures. After one particularly violent fit I went by arrangement to interview Mona. Ah, my dear young man, you cannot realize how painful and dangerous is the post-epileptic state. The mind remains in a deep narcosis, but the passions



are still violent and excited. It was in this condition that I did the murder."

The wild disorder of Oswald's features altered to a pallid smile—a look so secret, so expressive of a warped and twisted mind that Paul gripped the sides of his chair.

"My immediate impulse was to give myself up. Then, for the first time, the Inner Voice spoke to me. One word. 'Refrain.' It was not that I feared the consequences of my crime, but simply that I perceived stretching before me what I might do, in reparation and atonement." Oswald's manner suddenly grew lofty. "Thereupon I dedicated my life to the service of mankind."

"But what . . ." Paul interposed, "what about the man who was condemned?"

"Ah!" breathed Oswald in a tone of profound regret. "That was the one flaw in my scheme of reclamation. But it was so ordained. I will not deny that, several times, I was tempted to surrender myself. But the Voice spoke again, and again, more imperiously. What could I do? We are all the instruments of a Higher Power. Suffering is our lot. The end justifies the means." Again that bleak and twisted smile spread, slyly, over Oswald's face. "The Inner Voice even suggested steps, precautions to insure my safety, so that my great work might go forward. There were those, as you know, who sought to profit by a vague suspicion of my guilt. Although I imposed my will upon them, took them into my house, molded them as the potter does the clay, they remained a source of anxiety. Do not imagine that my life was one of ease. In prostrating seizures, twice and even three times a week, I endured my nervous malady. And most difficult of all was the constant guard I was obliged to keep upon myself, holding my inspired actions within the limits of convention so that all those outside prying eyes might not read my secret."

Oswald got up again and began to tread the floor with hunched shoulders and pale swinging hands. A shiver went through Paul as he watched the man's dark and tortured misery.

Suddenly, from the mist outside, came the faint note of a boat's foghorn. This unearthly sound, like the plaint of a tormented spirit, seemed to pierce Oswald to the heart. He drew up stiffly and, with staring eyes and head stretched back, he exclaimed: "The hour approaches. Sanctify Thy servant."

Steadying himself against the edge of the table, Oswald drew

a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his forehead. Then, wanly, he smiled at Paul.

"My dear young man, again I thank you for your kind attention. I shall be all right now, if you wish to leave me."

Paul hesitated, a strange glow of pity within his breast.

"You promise to go away?"

"I shall go away." Oswald smiled again. "This has not been unforeseen. I have resources at my command. Good-by—and God bless you."

He opened the door for Paul to depart.

CHAPTER 14

EXT MORNING, when the court opened, the atmosphere was electric. When it was seen that Sir Matthew was not in his place, curious rumors flew, barely stifled when he hastened to his seat, late, with a haggard, unslept look.

When their lordships were seated on the bench, Nigel Grahame stood up. "My lords," he announced, "with your permission I wish to resume my examination of the witness Louisa Burt."

A brief pause ensued while Burt took her place upon the stand.

"I trust," Grahame began, "that you have had the opportunity to compose yourself overnight."

"I'm all right." Burt spoke without her ingratiating coyness, almost rudely. Her hesitation of the previous day was gone as though she had been admonished and fortified. She stood up in the box and boldly returned Grahame's gaze.

"We were speaking," said Grahame, "of your acquaintance with Edward Collins. You saw a good deal of him before and during the trial?"

"How could I help it? We was together most of the time."

"Then you talked over the case with him frequently?"

"No," Burt said quickly. "We never mentioned it once."

Grahame raised his brows slightly and glanced toward the Lord Chief Justice before remarking: "That is a most surprising statement. However, we shall let it pass. Did you discuss the case with Collins *after* the trial?"

"No," Burt answered flatly.

"I must warn you," Grahame said steadily, "that you are upon

oath and that the penalties for perjury are exceedingly severe."

"My lords, I protest against that insinuation." The Attorney General half rose. "It is calculated to intimidate the witness."

"Did you and Collins *never* talk about the case?" Grahame insisted.

"Well—" for the first time Burt dropped her eyes "—I don't properly remember. I suppose we might have."

"In other words, you did?"

"Yes."

Grahame drew a long breath.

"On the night of the murder, when the man rushed past Edward Collins on the landing, he did not, even faintly, recognize him?"

"No," Burt answered loudly.

"And you? He was a total stranger to you?"

"Yes."

"You never told Collins that you felt you had seen the man before?"

"Never."

"You did not suggest a name to him?"

"No."

There was a fateful pause.

"To return to your own observation on that momentous evening . . . even if the street lamp was not lit . . . even if you could not clearly discern the features of the fugitive, at least you saw that he was running?"

"Yes. I've said so till I'm tired."

"Forgive me if I fatigue you unduly. Did the man run all the way to the end of the street?"

"Yes."

"He did not by any chance mount a bicycle, a bright-green bicycle, that lay against the railings, and pedal out of sight?"

"No."

Grahame looked gravely at the witness.

"In the light of certain information now in our possession I must again caution you to be careful. I repeat—did he not dash off on a green bicycle?"

Burt was shaken. She muttered: "I've told you 'No.' I can't do no more." She began to snivel into her handkerchief.

Once more the Attorney General protested. "My lords, I stren-

uously object to the means being used to intimidate this witness."

A flush rose to Grahame's cheek. He answered spiritedly: "Perhaps the Attorney General feels that I am usurping his prerogative. There have been days, in this very court, when I have heard an agent of the Crown using witnesses as a terrier might use a rat, reducing them to such a state of agitation that they did not know what they were saying. If only for that reason I am endeavoring to afford this witness the utmost consideration." Dead silence followed these words. Sir Matthew Sprott glanced toward the bench, but the Lord Chief Justice did not intervene. Grahame waited until Burt had dried her eyes.

"When the trial was over you came with Edward Collins to the Central Police Station to receive your reward."

"Yes, we did, and you can't make no harm out of that."

"Of course not. I must ask you to turn your thoughts back to a conversation you had with Collins in the police waiting room."

"What conversation?"

"Perhaps I can refresh your memory." Grahame picked up a slip of paper. "I suggest that the exchanges between Collins and yourself went in part like this:

COLLINS: Well, it's about over now, and I'm not sorry, it's really got me down.

BURT: Don't worry, Ed. You know we acted right and proper.

COLLINS: Yes, I dare say. All the same . . .

BURT: All the same what?

COLLINS: Oh, you know, Louisa. Why didn't you tell about . . . you know what?

BURT: Because they never asked me, stupid.

COLLINS: I suppose not. Will we . . . will we get the reward?

BURT: We'll get it, Ed, don't worry. We might even do better.

COLLINS: What do you mean?

BURT: You just wait and see. I've got something up my sleeve.

COLLINS: Mathry was the man, wasn't he, Louisa?

BURT: Shut up, will you. It's too late to back down now. We didn't do no harm. With all that evidence they would have done for Mathry anyhow. And after all, he didn't get hung. Don't you understand, you fool, it don't pay to go against the police. Besides, things may come out of this better than you ever dreamed. I'll live like a lady yet before I'm through."

When Grahame finished reading he turned sternly toward the witness.

"Do you deny that this conversation, which was overheard and transcribed, actually took place?"

"I don't know. I can't remember. I'm not responsible for what Ed Collins said." Burt gave her answer in a flustered voice.

"When you had received the reward what did you do?"

"I forget exactly."

"Did you not go off on a holiday to Margate with Collins?"

"I believe I did."

"Did you and he occupy the same room at the Beach Hotel?"

"Certainly not. And I didn't come here to be insulted."

"Then perhaps you would rather I did not show the court the hotel register of that date."

"My lords," again the Attorney General interposed, "I must protest these irrelevant allegations against the moral character of the witness."

Grahame said, "Yet when more damaging and less true allegations were made fifteen years ago against my client's morals the Crown raised no objection."

There was a silence. Grahame turned to Burt.

"When this vacation was over you returned to Wortley. You discovered that the atmosphere had changed. You were scarcely the popular heroine you had imagined you might be. Work was difficult to find. And it was precisely at this juncture that both Edward Collins and yourself were offered excellent situations in a private house. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"Who was the owner of that house?"

Burt's defiance was gone. There was a hush as she brought out the name: "Mr. Enoch Oswald."

"Am I correct in asserting that Mr. Oswald behaved with remarkable kindness toward Collins, married him to his head parlormaid, then shipped him off to New Zealand?"

"I think he treated Ed handsome," Burt mumbled.

"And you?" queried Grahame suavely. "Were you not treated by him with equal consideration?"

Burt muttered a crushed assent. Every eye was fixed on Grahame as he put his next question.

"Can you account for the remarkable interest shown by Mr.

Oswald in you and Collins, the two key witnesses of the Mathry case?"

Burt shook her head dumbly.

"Could it be in any way connected with the fact . . ." Grahame queried temperately, "that Enoch Oswald was the landlord of the flat occupied by Mona Spurling?"

There was a mortal stillness in the court.

"Mr. Oswald was fairly regular in his calls at the flat, to collect his monthly rent, to see to the comfort of his tenant. Since he came of an evening, he might well have been noticed, vaguely, by Collins, who was frequently on the street at that hour."

"I . . . I suppose so."

Then, like a knife thrust: "Did Oswald use a bicycle to make these visits?"

"What if he did . . . and a green bike at that!" Burt moaned. "It had nothing to do with me."

"One last question," Grahame said casually, as a kind of after-thought. "We have heard considerable mention, yesterday and today, of a left-handed man. Is Mr. Oswald left-handed?"

Burt was at the end of her resources. She let out a gasp.

"Yes, he is," she screamed. "And I don't care who knows it."

After that she went into hysterics. The court seethed with excitement. Reporters hurried toward the telephones.

When Burt had been assisted from the stand, Grahame turned toward the bench to deliver his final address.

"My lords," he began, "we pride ourselves upon the principle that any man is presumed innocent until he is found guilty. A person may be suspected, but the burden of proof rests upon the Crown.

"Now, the Crown, my lords, has great resources at its command—brains, money and authority. Its agents, being human, are anxious not only to justify their legitimate suspicions but to advance themselves, to stand well in the public eye. The experts whom it engages, men of the highest quality, may nevertheless be influenced by this prevailing mood. Once an unhappy wretch has become suspect, a biased attitude of mind develops, almost instinctively, an attitude hostile and prejudicial to the accused man.

"Consider the case of this ordinary citizen before us, not a strong character, but on the whole neither better nor worse than his fellows. Unhappy at home, he understandably lets his eye wander.

He is introduced by a friend to an attractive young woman, he flirts with her a little, and, after some weeks, sends her a post card asking her to dinner. Then, to his horror, only a few days later, he discovers that the woman has been brutally murdered, and that the police are seeking high and low for the sender of the post card.

"What on earth is he to do? He knows he ought to come forward and make a voluntary admission to the police. But the threat of involving himself holds him back. Besides, there is one question they are sure to ask him. Where was he between eight and nine on the evening of September eighth? Casting back anxiously, he remembers he had gone to the cinema, alone, and had, in fact, fallen asleep during the performance. What a useless alibi! Who could have seen him, sitting there in the dark?

"Badly frightened, he loses his head and, instead of going to the authorities, he cooks up an alibi with his friend. Presently he is discovered as the writer of the post card. He offers his alibi and it is proved to be false. From that instant he is ensnared. A structure of damning evidence, his trip so like an escape, his resistance of arrest, rises against him. But certain discrepancies also come to light—a peculiar moneybag found beside the body, a green bicycle that might well have been used by the murderer, neither of which can in any way be identified with the prisoner. Yet these discrepancies are ignored by the prosecution. They do not fit, therefore they are discarded. And in court they are not even mentioned.

"My lords, it is my contention that the Crown's conduct of the case against Rees Mathry was calculated to prevent, and did prevent, a fair trial. There were serious omissions of evidence. Moreover, the Prosecutor's speech to the jury was directed, not to their minds, but to their feelings, inducing in them not logic but violent emotions of horror, anger, repulsion and revenge. In my opinion the speech delivered by the Crown against Rees Mathry strikes at the very root of our criminal administration."

As Grahame paused, Paul threw a quick glance toward Sprott. The Prosecutor's ruddy face had turned pale as death.

"It is, moreover, my submission," Grahame resumed, "that in his charge to the jury the presiding judge at the trial was both inaccurate and misleading. He lectured on the character of the prisoner to his extreme prejudice and failed to direct the attention of the jury to the grave irregularities I have instanced."

Grahame suddenly extended his right hand toward the bench.

"My lords, it is clear that Mathry is innocent, the victim of a ghastly travesty of justice. The witness Burt has indicated only too plainly the real perpetrator of the crime.

"My lords, I entreat you to redress an awful wrong, to admit the culpability of the Crown, and to proclaim to the world the innocence of Rees Mathry."

There were tears in Paul's eyes as Grahame sat down amid a storm of cheering.

When order was restored, the Attorney General, having completed a long consultation with his colleagues, got reluctantly to his feet to put the case for the Crown. When he sat down the Lord Chief Justice immediately adjourned the court.

It was four o'clock before their lordships returned to the court. The Lord Chief Justice, dignified and impenetrable, delivered the verdict: "We announce that the judgment of the court before whom the appellant was convicted should be set aside."

Pandemonium . . . hats in the air . . . wild and unrestrained cheering. People crowding round to pat Paul on the back: Dunn and McEvoy, Nigel Grahame—why, here was old Prusty, wheezily embracing him. Over there, Dale, more than ever stony-faced, Sprott pressing toward the exit, dazed by the blow. Ella Fleming and his mother, bewildered, still ashamed. The pastor, his eyes closed as if in prayer.

Paul moved to where was seated that broken man whom they would no longer call a murderer.

CHAPTER 15

THEY HAD WON. Nothing could flatten out the triumph of this final victory. Yet Paul's nerves were still overcharged. He was faced with a future that remained undetermined and precarious.

He got back to the Windsor at four o'clock. As he came along the corridor, he saw Ella's luggage standing strapped and labeled. When he entered the sitting room he found her seated there, wearing her hat and gloves, and that determined air which in the past presaged a fixed course of action for them both. The sight of her crystallized his uncertainty. He took a drink of water from the sideboard carafe, feeling her eyes upon him.

"Well, it's all over now," he said.

"I should hope so." Sitting very erect, she gave her head a sharp toss.

"I know it hasn't been pleasant, Ella," he said reasonably. "But we had to go through with it."

"Oh, we had, had we? That's what you think. But I don't. I think it's all been completely useless. What have you got out of it? Absolutely nothing."

He flushed. "All I wanted was to vindicate my father."

"That did a fat lot of good. The way he's been carrying on, you'd have been better off if you'd left him where he was. He's just a drunken, disgusting old man."

"Ella! The prison did it . . . he wasn't always that way."

"Well, he's that way now. And I've more than had enough of it. I was never so humiliated in my life, to think that nice people would know that I was remotely connected with such a person."

A silence fell which she interpreted as an indication of his submission. Mollified, she spoke in a milder tone.

"Come along, then. Get your things packed."

"What for?"

"Because we're leaving, silly. There's a seven-o'clock boat from Holyhead."

"I can't leave him, Ella."

She looked at him, amazed, and then aghast.

"I never heard such nonsense in my life. He doesn't want you. The minute he came out of the court he slunk off to some low pub. Well, let him stick there."

He shook his head. "I'm not coming."

The blood mounted to her forehead. Her eyes flashed.

"If you don't, Paul, I warn you, you'll be sorry. I've put up with a good deal for your sake. But I can go so far, and no farther. . . ."

While she continued to upbraid him the door opened. Mr. Fleming and Paul's mother came into the room. Both were dressed for the journey. The minister glanced from Paul to his daughter.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Everything!" Ella cried. "After all we've done for him, Paul has the nerve to pretend he isn't coming back with us."

A troubled expression came into Fleming's eyes. During these last weeks he had suffered a constant warring within himself. He had hoped to regenerate Mathry and he had failed; the defeat

pressed on the roots of his belief. He temporized in well-worn phrases he had almost come to despise: "Don't you think you have done enough, my boy? You have worked so . . . so nobly."

"Oh, yes, Paul." His mother pleaded in a subdued voice. "You must come with us."

Breaking into angry tears, Ella said: "So far as I'm concerned, it is the end, anyway. He cares more for that old man than he does for me. I'll never speak to him again."

Fleming made an effort to pacify his daughter, but Ella was too far gone to heed his words. And Paul's mother was now too cast down to aid him. She desired nothing but immediate escape.

At last the minister gave up. He salved his conscience and saved his dignity in part by giving Paul a long and silent hand-clasp. A few minutes later they were gone.

Paul could scarcely believe it. Alone in the room, he sank into a chair in weary relief. A load seemed to be lifted from his mind. He knew that he would never see Ella again. He felt free.

As he sat there the door opened and, slowly, Mathry came in.

He was quite sober; but he seemed tired. He advanced sluggishly to a chair, sat down, and darted a glance at Paul from beneath his ragged brows. When Paul said nothing, he asked heavily: "Have they cleared out?"

"Yes."

"Good riddance." Then he added: "What keeps you hanging around? I suppose you want some of my cash when I get it?"

"That's it," Paul agreed calmly. He had found this the best way of dealing with his father's sardonic thrusts. And indeed, the answer silenced Mathry. But, from time to time, he darted glances at his son, as though he hoped that Paul would speak to him. Almost in desperation, Mathry threw the question: "Had your supper?"

"I was just going to order something."

"Then order for me as well."

Paul asked room service to send up dinner for two. They sat down to it in silence. Mathry ate with less than his usual appetite, and after a while his efforts seemed to flag. Without finishing his dessert, he stood up and went over to the armchair where he slowly filled and lit the pipe which he had recently adopted. His lumpy figure sagged. He looked a spent old man.

"I'm sick of that gang I've been running around with." He

spoke with sudden bitterness. "All they're doing is making a mug of me. They keep telling me what a great man I am, then they order the drinks and let me pay for them. Dirty lot of spongers."

Suddenly, to Paul's concern and distress, Mathry's chest gave a great heave. His stiff face began, under its mask, to work pitifully.

"Everything goes wrong for me. Every blasted thing. Even the retrial. Why wouldn't they let me speak? They were only laughing up their sleeves at me. I'm-a freak . . . don't fit in anywhere. I'll never be any good. I'm finished and done for."

His pipe had gone out, his face was gray, his whole body shook with anguish. Paul felt his heart melt. This weakness in his father, this unexpected gleam of hope was too precious to be wasted.

"You're certainly not done for." He waited for this to sink in. "What you've had to go through has changed you a lot. But as far as years go, you're not an old man. It's up to you to readjust your ideas and go in for what really suits you."

"Nothing suits me," Mathry muttered. "I've a good mind to finish myself. Coming by the canal tonight, I near threw myself in."

"That would be an excellent way to repay me."

Mathry raised his head and stole a look at his son. "Yes," he muttered. "You've been good to me, you have."

"Drown yourself, if you want to," Paul continued in a cutting tone. "Get out of your troubles the easy way. But it seems to me there's a slightly more sensible idea. You'll be getting a lump sum for damages soon. Why don't you buy yourself a little farm in the country . . . get out in the fresh air, have your own place . . . forget about hating people. You'll get your health back in the country . . . feel younger in mind and body."

"I couldn't do it," Mathry said in a husky voice.

"Yes you could," Paul exclaimed. "And I'll help you. I'll try and finish my schooling near you. Be on hand if you need me."

"Would you?"

"Yes."

Mathry again stole that shrinking look at Paul. His chapped lips trembled. "I'm all in," he muttered. "I think I'll go to bed."

Paul felt his heart lift, as at a great victory. What had caused Mathry to break down in this fashion he could not guess—he had not dared to hope for it. But in this crumbling front he saw a future for both of them, a final justification snatched in the moment

of defeat. He looked straight at his father, keeping his voice under control. "You'll feel better after a good sleep."

Mathry got to his feet. "In the country . . ." he muttered. "With chickens and a cow . . . it would be fine . . . but could I . . . ?"

"Yes," Paul said again, more firmly.

There was a moment's hesitation.

"All right," Mathry said in a queer hoarse tone. He opened his mouth, closed it again. "Now I'll go and turn in." Suddenly he paused, as though struck by something, lifted his head and looked into the distance. His voice took on a different quality—remote, and strangely timorous.

"Do you remember . . . Paul . . . on Jesmond Dene . . . when we used to sail the paper boats?"

He gave his son a shamed, contorted look and, brushing his hand across his eyes, shambled out of the room.

FOR A LONG time Paul remained in the sitting room. Now, after all, he could carry out his plan. He would complete his teacher's course at one of the smaller English provincial universities, and find some sort of dwelling, no matter how primitive, to house them both, with a garden in which Mathry might find the incentive to work out his own salvation.

Paul got to his feet. He wished nothing to disturb the new sense of peace which had replaced his rage against the law. It was not late, and before retiring he decided to take a walk. Switching out the light, he went downstairs.

The evenings were lengthening and, outside, the last of the daylight lingered, as though reluctant to depart. Stirred by the beauty of the twilight, he strolled away from the hotel.

He had meant to walk at random, but half an hour later he found himself in Ware Place. Outside Lena's lodging he drew up, and from the opposite side of the street, resting against the iron railings, he gazed upward at the unlit windows.

The days of stifling uncertainty were over, and his nerves were no longer on the rack. He was at last free to appreciate all that Lena had done for him. Now he realized that without her help his father would still be in Stoneheath and he, almost certainly, would not have survived. A pang of regret for his insensitiveness, his lack of gratitude, his puerile attitude toward her tragedy, stung him. He had a sudden almost unbearable longing to see her

again. If only she might appear, at this instant, from the shadows, bareheaded as usual, wearing her old raincoat; so generous and humble, so heedless of herself, with a freshness like the dew.

From the Ware steeple came eleven slow strokes, and still he remained looking upward at those three blank windows. He would go to Dunn, tomorrow, and obtain Lena's address. He foresaw the circumstances which would enable him to find her and, as though that moment had already come, he was filled with happiness.

At last he turned slowly away. In the main thoroughfare a few newsboys were calling the final editions. His eye was caught by a placard beneath a street lamp. Arrested, he took a few steps back, handed over a coin, and held the copy of the *Chronicle* to the flickering light. The police had broken into the flat at Ushaw Terrace and found Enoch Oswald. He had hanged himself from the gas fixture.

Paul slowly recovered himself. "Poor devil," he muttered at last.

All bitterness, the last shreds of hatred, seemed purged from him. He drew a long deep breath. The night air was damp and cool. From a nearby basement bakehouse, where the men were already at work, came the fragrance of new bread. There was no moon but through the rooftops a few clear stars looked down upon the city as it settled at last to silence. Insensibly, Paul's heart lifted. His step quickened as he set out for the hotel. For the first time in many months he felt the sweet savor of life, and the promise of the morning.





Illustrations by Malcolm Murley

BLACK WIDOW

A condensation of the book by
PATRICK QUENTIN



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A. J. Cronin



SINCE A. J. Cronin's instant success with his first novel, *Hatter's Castle*, in 1931, he has written a long line of smashing best-sellers—all of them still being reprinted throughout the world—including such widely loved novels as *The Stars Look Down*, *The Citadel* and *The Keys of the Kingdom*.

In his autobiography, *Adventures in Two Worlds* (Condensed Books, Spring 1952), Dr. Cronin described his childhood in Scotland, his early days as a doctor, first among coal miners and then with a smart London practice, and his growing urge toward writing. It was a six-month convalescence in 1930 which gave him the chance to write his first book.

Married to another ex-doctor and the father of three grown sons, Dr. Cronin is now living in Switzerland, but he still likes to set his stories in the industrial, workingman's England he knows so well. His most recent novel is *The Northern Light* (Condensed Books, Summer 1958), a story of the responsibility of a free press.

HOW CAN an attractive man convince his wife—and the police—that a young woman found in incriminating circumstances in his apartment was “just a friend”? That was the problem confronting theatrical producer Peter Duluth.

It would never have happened if his wife, Iris, whom he adored, had not been away. Even so, Peter Duluth's motive in paying any attention to the lonely girl at the party was simple kindness, touched with male vanity. She looked so dowdy, so forlorn, and she responded with such touching humility. It flattered Peter to help her a little.

It was all so innocent. Yet Peter Duluth was caught in a web of evil, in a labyrinth from which there seemed no escape, where every new turn brought fresh danger. You'll guess and fear and second-guess with him as he tries to fight his way out. And you won't lay *Black Widow* aside until you've learned, as he does, the whole strange truth about Nanny Ordway.

“*Black Widow* is at once a first-rate formal detective story . . . and a compelling straight suspense novel. . . .”

—Anthony Boucher in
The New York Times Book Review

CHAPTER 1

I MET Nanny Ordway at one of Lottie Marin's parties. It was a very ordinary beginning for an episode that dragged us all into disaster. My wife had taken her mother to Jamaica to recover from an operation, and I had too much work on hand in New York to go with them. The day they left, around midnight after the show, Lottie Marin called from upstairs.

"Come on up, Peter. There's a party."

I didn't want to go to a party or to encourage Lottie Marin's obvious determination to organize me as a grass widower. But I was missing Iris, and I thought I might as well go up just for a while.

Lottie's apartment, which was immediately above our own, was full of assorted guests, the way it always was on Saturday nights. "Peter, darling!" Lottie came to the door for me herself. "I knew you'd be lonely. I knew you'd just be sitting there moping for Iris."

Lottie and I had known each other around the theater for years. But recently, since she and her husband had become our neighbors and I had produced and directed her latest show, *Star Rising*, she had developed one of her sudden and celebrated infatuations for Iris and myself. Most people in the theater, although Lottie was a great star and a world-wide celebrity, avoided intimacy with her because she was nosy, bossy and insufferably demanding. But Iris and I had put up with her bullying crush not only because I had to work with her but because we were both, in a funny way, fond of her.

"Darling, Alec Ryder's just in from London. He saw *Star Rising* tonight and he adored me. He's dying to talk to you.

Come on. Brian will fix you a drink." She looped her arm through mine, giving me a meaning glance. "At least—I suppose you are drinking tonight, aren't you?"

That was one of those irritating remarks for which Lottie had a genius. Years ago, before I met Iris, I had gone off the rails after my first wife's death and ended up in a nervous breakdown. At the time of my cure the doctors had told me I should never drink when I was depressed. It was something everyone else had forgotten. But Lottie remembered, and now she was dragging it out to show what an old friend she was.

I snapped, "Why shouldn't I be drinking, Lottie?"

She squeezed my hand. "You know best, darling, of course. I was just a little worried. That's all."

She took me to a bar where Brian Mullen, her latest and most successful husband, was mixing drinks. Brian grinned at me.

"Hi, Peter. Be right with you. Have to take a lemonade to a forlorn little female in a corner." He carried the lemonade to a girl who was sitting alone by the window. That girl was Nanny Ordway, but I didn't know it at the time. I hardly glanced at her. She wasn't at all a conspicuous person.

Lottie brought Alec Ryder over. Alec Ryder was a very successful and smooth English playwright married to one of London's brightest young theatrical stars. He said all the right things about Lottie and *Star Rising*, and Lottie started to purr like an ocelot with its spine tickled.

She purred less when Alec Ryder told us why he had flown to New York. He had just finished a new play and was looking for an American actress to do the lead in London. He thought my wife, who was an actress, too, would be perfect in the part. Did I think she might be interested?

Almost before his words were out, Lottie broke in, "Darling, it's quite impossible. Iris has decided to take a year's vacation."

That was perfectly true. But Lottie had no right to say it. I should have said it.

"Yes, darling," she continued, "Iris is just going to be Mrs. Duluth for a whole year. You know how crazy she and Peter are about each other. Just like Brian and me."

Some blond actress whom I vaguely recognized had come over and was talking to Brian. When Lottie had a couple of drinks in her she always got possessive about her husband. Now she neatly

edged between him and the actress and twined her arms around his neck. I pretended to see someone I knew and drifted away.

I saw quite a few people but no one that fitted my mood. Gordon Ling, to whom I'd given a biggish part in *Star Rising*, flashed me a smile. But Gordon, too handsome at forty-five, too cheerful, too determined not to admit failure, was a most actorish actor. I knew he wanted to complain about a couple of lines of his I had cut at a recent run-through and I couldn't have faced him right then. I turned away, walking toward the window.

That's how I met Nanny Ordway. I hadn't the slightest intention of stopping to speak to her, but as I passed she put out her hand and, surprisingly, touched my arm.

"Won't you talk to me?" she said. "I don't think I'm terribly dull. Let's find out what you think."

I paused and looked down at the girl sitting there in front of the expanse of undraped window below which the East River was glittering. She wasn't pretty or at all smartly dressed. Those were the first things I noticed. I noticed, too, that she was very young and she didn't seem to be wearing any make-up. She held a half-empty lemonade glass in her hand.

"I wish you'd sit down." Her voice was light and pleasant. "My mother always told me that a girl who couldn't get a man to talk to her after the first thirty minutes at a party might as well go out and shoot herself."

I liked her voice. I rather liked her face. It was intelligent and not trying to be anything it wasn't. Her hair was dark and she wore it in a page-boy bob with bangs. She was a little Greenwich Villagey, but then that made her so completely unlike Iris, and it was Iris's absence I was trying to forget.

I sat down next to her on the window seat.

"Is your half hour up yet?"

"You mean my half hour for shooting myself? Oh, yes, long ago. No one's talked to me at all. Some people brought me but they've gone off being glamorous. I hope you're not glamorous. I hope you're not an Important Figure like everyone else."

"Don't you like important figures?"

"I don't know. I suppose I should. But I've never met any before. I don't know what to do with them."

"You just tell them how important they are and they give little grunts of satisfaction."

"They do?" She turned to me, tucking her legs under her on the window seat. "You'd better tell me who you are. If you're important, I'd like to hear you grunt."

"My name's Peter Duluth," I said.

The blood flooded her cheeks. She was one of those girls who can look charming and embarrassed at the same time.

"You—you're a producer or something terribly grand in the theater and you're married to Iris Duluth, aren't you?"

"That's right."

"I never realized . . . I mean, I wouldn't ever have . . . Iris Duluth is wonderful. She's the most beautiful, moving actress I've ever seen."

"And who are you?"

"I'm not anything special. Just a person."

"What do you do?"

"Really, I suppose, I'm a writer. I haven't got anything published yet. I don't think I'm very good."

"How old are you?"

"Nineteen. No, that's a lie. I'm twenty. I try to pretend I'm not in the twenties because in the twenties you're supposed to have done something."

Until then, I'd started to forget what a kid she was. You have to be terribly young to make a remark like that.

"I know," I said. "Mozart wrote an opera when he was twelve."

"Well, it's true, isn't it?" she said almost angrily. "You can't just grow up. At least you've got to show talent."

"And you haven't shown any talent?"

"I don't think so. Sometimes it's terribly depressing."

"Isn't that lemonade terribly depressing? Have a drink."

"No, thank you. I don't drink. I used to. I gave it up. But if there's anything to eat . . . I'm simply starved."

Suddenly an idea came to me. I was bored with the party. The girl was hungry. Why shouldn't I take her out and give her something to eat? An innocent change of pace never harmed anyone. I said, "Are you tired of this party?"

"No tireder than it is of me."

"Do you have to wait for the people you came with?"

"Mercy, no. They only brought me because they were stuck with me. They've probably left."

"Then how about coming out and getting something to eat?"

She said quickly, "But what about Iris Duluth—your wife?"

"She's away."

"Oh."

"You don't have to say Oh. I'm not one of those husbands who suddenly discover their wives don't understand them."

"You're very much in love with her, aren't you? One reads about it in columns."

"Yes, I'm very much in love with her."

She smiled then. "Fine. I'll come. I'd like it."

"What's your name?"

"Nanny," she said. "Nanny Ordway."

I didn't want the complication of saying good night to Lottie, but as we were making for the door she came swooping over.

"Peter, you poor darling. I've been neglecting you." She stopped and looked penetratingly at Nanny Ordway. "Who's that?"

"That," I said, "is Miss Ordway. One of your guests. I'm taking her out to get something to eat. Then I'm going to bed. Say thanks to Brian for me. See you tomorrow."

Lottie stood quite still. "Well!" she said in her theater voice, which can suggest a dozen simultaneous overtones.

I could have killed her, but instead I kissed her.

"Good night, Lottie. Don't rock the boat."

When we were out in Sutton Place, Nanny Ordway slipped her arm through mine.

"She was furious. Charlotte Marin. Simply furious."

"Lottie only likes things she sponsors herself."

"To think of it! Charlotte Marin furious about me! That I should live to see the day."

I was wondering where to take her to eat at that hour, but she decided for me. There was a Hamburger Heaven on Fifty-fifth at Madison, and we could walk. It was warm for October and refreshing to be walking through the still active Saturday-night streets. We sat on bar stools and ate hamburgers with coffee from thick china mugs. Most very young girls make me feel decrepit at thirty-seven, but she didn't. I felt amused and kindly—and amused at myself. For over ten years my interests, my desires, my affections had been exclusively tied up with my wife. It was improbable that I should be out with a girl only a few hours after Iris's departure, but it seemed to be the right therapy.

"Better for the food?" I asked.

"Wonderful. Once I lived for six months on hamburgers."

She turned on her stool, looking at me solemnly. "Have you ever been poor?"

"Not terribly."

"It's fun. It's almost like being in love. You wake up in the morning and you're yearning for something. You have the feeling: how long can I wait? You count the minutes till noon. And it isn't a man you're yearning for. It's a hamburger."

"Are you still poor?"

"Oh, yes."

"Live with parents?"

"No. I live alone. Kind of. With a girl from Boston." She put down her empty coffee cup. "You're rich. Rich and in love. That must be fun, too. But mostly the love part. Isn't it?"

"It's fine."

She talked about Iris then. She had seen all her recent plays and quite a lot of her movies. She was intelligent and enthusiastic about her. It always pleased me to have Iris praised. Somehow Nanny Ordway bridged the gulf of Iris's absence. Instead of brooding about the fact that she was away, I started to think: It won't be long before she's back.

After she'd finished her coffee Nanny Ordway got up. "Now I must go home."

"So soon?"

"Oh, yes. I have to be at my desk at nine every day."

"Mozart got up at six."

She laughed. "That's right. Kid me when I get pretentious. That's my trouble. I'm pretentious."

Outside on Madison Avenue, I started looking for a taxi, but she stopped me. I could walk her to the Lexington Avenue subway station, she said. We talked all the way. She entertained me. I didn't want it to be over so quickly.

At the head of the subway stairs, she held out her hand. "Good night. You've taught me one thing. I do like Important Figures."

"And I like twenty-year-old girls who haven't Achieved Anything."

"Don't be silly. I'm just a whim. Good night."

She started down the stairs. I called after her impulsively:

"I can phone you?"

"I'm not in the book."

I could hear a train roaring into the station below me.

"Then give me your number."

Without answering Nanny Ordway hurried down the steps and disappeared.

CHAPTER 2

I WAS awakened next morning around ten thirty by the phone. It was Lottie.

"Peter, are you alone?"

"For heaven's sake, what else would I be?"

"That's good. Then come up. Breakfast is ready. Brian's fixing everything."

"I'm not hungry," I said, fighting for my independence.

"You'd better be." Brian's cheerful voice sounded on the kitchen extension. "Scrambled eggs and sausages."

"But . . ."

"Nonsense," broke in Lottie. I could just see her at the other end of the phone making ferocious doodles all over the telephone pad the way she always did when she felt she was being crossed. "If you're not here in five minutes, I'll come down and get you."

Resignedly, I got out of bed, put on a robe and went upstairs.

Sundays, the daily woman who worked for both Lottie and us didn't show up. Lottie and Brian always ate breakfast in the kitchen because it made Lottie feel domestic. When I went in, I found her husband, tall, amiable and handsome in a yellow robe, bending over the stove scrambling eggs.

Brian was the luckiest thing that had ever happened to Lottie. She had discovered him when she did her only picture in Hollywood five years before. He was a Montana boy who had been in the Coast Guard during the war. He had all the standard male requirements except any visible ambition. He had played a few small parts in some of Lottie's successes and had done a little stage managing. But Lottie really preferred to keep him at home as a private asset and he never objected. He seemed perfectly happy answering her fan mail, cooking for her, running errands, and reminding her how wonderful she was. Everyone agreed that Brian should be permanently endowed by Actors

Equity for his great service to the theater in keeping Lottie Marin contented.

She sat down at the table and watched me with that gimlet look of hers. I knew exactly what was on her mind. It came out when we were halfway through our eggs.

"Well, Peter, who was that girl?"

"What girl?" I asked innocently.

"That girl you sneaked away with from the party."

"Her name's Nanny Ordway. I told you."

"I never invited her. I never heard of her. Brian, did you?"

"Nanny Ordway? Don't think I know her. Should I?"

"Some people brought her," I said.

"Who?" demanded Lottie.

"I don't know. She didn't say."

"Well, I wish people wouldn't do things like that." The gimlet glance was back boring into me. "What exactly did you do with her anyway?"

"I took her to Hamburger Heaven and talked about Iris. Then I took her to her subway."

"Well," said Lottie, one perfectly mated individual to another, "I suppose it was all right. But I do think it's rather peculiar—with Iris only gone a few hours."

"Better cable her," I said. "*Return at once. Peter unfaithful.*"

"Don't be silly. Still, I don't think it was wise. When a man's been married over ten years, he's in a very dangerous phase. It's a well-known fact."

Lottie had it all figured that I was to spend the rest of the morning with them and catch a Sunday matinee so as not to be lonely. But I managed to slip away around noon, saying I had scripts to read. It was true. I was looking for another play to do that season. I got through the afternoon reading bad manuscripts and wondering why so many hundreds of misguided people think they can write plays. Then I went out to dinner with Alec Ryder, who tried to sell me again on Iris doing his play in London. It was a mild enough Sunday. I went on missing Iris all the time and wrote to her about Alec's offer, knowing she'd turn it down. I had meant to mention Nanny Ordway in the letter, but by that time, after my session with Alec, I had forgotten her.

I didn't, in fact, think about Nanny Ordway until the mail

came on Monday morning. One of the envelopes was addressed in a large and sprawling handwriting. Inside it there was nothing but a little kid's line drawing of a girl sitting at a telephone with a typed telephone number floating above her in a balloon.

I smiled when I saw it and took it with me to the office. I went every day to the office even though, half the time, when I had no new play getting started, there wasn't much to do because of Miss Mills. Miss Mills had been with me ten years and took most of the chores off me. She supervised the stenographers, answered most of the mail, weeded out playscripts, got rid of the wrong actors, charmed the right actors, and settled most of the squabbles of the *Star Rising* company. Miss Mills played it sour but she was mother to all the world.

I had a conference with her about a script she was crazy for and I didn't like. Then I spent ten minutes or so calming down Gordon Ling, the actor from *Star Rising* who had been at Lottie's two nights before. After he left, I took Nanny Ordway's drawing out of my pocket. On an impulse I dialed the number.

A girl's voice answered, "Hello."

"Nanny Ordway?"

"Who's calling?" The voice sounded Bostonian and severe. The roommate.

"Peter Duluth."

"Wait a moment, please."

Soon Nanny came on the phone. "Hello." It was nice to hear her. It brought back pleasant memories.



"Hello. I just thought I'd call to find out how inspiration was flowing."

"It's flowing okay, I guess."

"That was a cute picture. Giotto was fifteen when Cimabue found him drawing sheep."

"There's no need to kid me. I haven't been pretentious yet, have I?"

It suddenly occurred to me that I had no lunch date. It would be amusing to see her and why shouldn't I? "How about lunch?"

"I'm sorry, I have lots more work to do."

"Dinner any better?"

She paused. "Do you really mean it?"

"Of course."

"Then if you'll do it my way. Come here. You've already fed me. I'll cook dinner for you. You should see how unimportant figures live."

"Fine."

She gave me the address and elaborate subway directions. Soon after she hung up, Miss Mills came in.

"What have you been doing, Peter? You look furtive."

Did I look furtive? It was stupid. There was nothing to look furtive about. But I almost wished I hadn't called. I wrote a letter to Iris. It was, as usual, a love letter. In it, I said:

I forgot to tell you I've already been wildly unfaithful. I took a twenty-year-old girl away from Lottie's party the other day and fed her hamburgers. Now I'm going to have dinner with her in the Village. She has bangs and plans to be a literary genius and thinks you're wonderful. . . .

I arrived at Nanny Ordway's apartment on Charlton Street at seven o'clock.

She opened the door to me in an apron over the same dress she had worn at Lottie's party. She looked homely until she smiled. I was glad she hadn't tried to fix herself up for me and glad that I didn't find her attractive at all. The girl she roomed with was out, she said. I was to make myself comfortable in the living room and not to fuss her in the kitchen. The living room was a bedroom, too. There were two studio couches. The Bostonian roommate seemed to be a painter. The walls were hung



with rather surly still lifes of a Braque-ish variety. There were other pictures stacked against the walls and an easel pushed into a corner. Books were lying around over everything—lofty books: Santayana, Malraux's *Psychologie de l'Art*, and some Henry James. A bottle of Chianti and a glass were on the cluttered coffee table by a bunch of violets in a jelly jar.

It was all depressingly bohemian and rather pathetic.

I felt physically uncomfortable and a little foolish. I couldn't quite see any more what I was doing in a twenty-year-old girl's apartment. Finally Nanny came in with a spaghetti dinner. It wasn't terribly good. We ate it on separate ends of the coffee table with Henry James slipping every now and then into the meat sauce.

The whole thing would have been awful if it hadn't been for Nanny's enthusiasm. She sat there next to me, her dark hair falling over her young face, pleased about every minute of it. She chattered in her leaping, inconsequential way. I felt ashamed of being bored, ashamed, too, of my own unadmitted prudishness.

There was a phonograph in the living room. She made coffee and put on Welitch's record of the end of *Salomé*. She listened with all her body as if the music had been written especially for her. She didn't talk about herself or her writing. She didn't even talk about me. She just seemed to like my company.

Afterward we went out to some neighborhood cafés—"the real Greenwich Village." They were none of them very exciting. In fact, without Nanny, they would have seemed sordid and raffish, full of faky "artistic" types. We even danced at one dim little joint with a three-piece hot orchestra. She didn't dance as well as Iris.

"You see?" she said, smiling at me, proud as if she had given me the biggest kick of my life. "You don't have to be rich to have fun."

But I didn't really have fun. I was almost glad when she said she had to go home. She stood on the steps above the ash cans put out for the garbage truck with her door key in her hand. I thought of that cluttered room she had to go back to with her roommate probably washing nylons in the bathroom. I shouldn't have come. It hadn't got anyone anywhere.

"Good-by, Peter."

"Good-by, Nanny."

ABOUT TWO weeks went by before I had anything more to do with Nanny Ordway. Then one morning around eleven Miss Mills came into my office.

"Peter, there's a girl out there who won't go away. She says you picked her up last night at a dance palace and promised her a part in a road company of *Star Rising*. She says she's come to sign the contracts."

"She's crazy. What's her name?"

Miss Mills grimaced. "Gloria," she said. "Gloria O'Dream. Peter, you didn't do anything charmingly boyish last night, did you?"

"Of course not. It's some kind of gag. Well, let her in."

Nanny came in. After Miss Mills had shut the door on her, she crossed to my desk. She was wearing an old tweed coat and no hat. She had a Manila envelope in her hand.

"Hello. That was meant to be funny—that about Gloria O'Dream. I suppose it wasn't, was it?"

I didn't quite know how I felt. Mostly I think I was flustered about Miss Mills, who wasn't at all pixy.

She looked so worried that I smiled. "It's a pleasure. Sit down, Miss O'Dream. What's that envelope you've got?"

She sat down in a chair across the desk from me. "Oh, it's just a manuscript. I've been to pick it up at *The New Yorker*. They turned it down."

"That's too bad."

"They said it was okay to write like Truman Capote and okay to write like Somerset Maugham. But it wasn't okay to write like them both at once. I've got to work a lot yet. I know that. Years maybe before I'm any good." She got up after a couple of minutes and said she had to go.

"I just came in because I was passing."

"I'm glad."

She turned at the door, the Manila envelope pressed against her small breasts. "Is it silly if I ask you something?"

"Of course not. Go ahead."

"If ever you feel like it, call me. Oh, I don't want you to take me out. Nothing like that. But between friends—I do like a link. Will you? Call, I mean?"

"Sure I will."

"Thank you. Thank you so much."

She was out of the office before I realized that I didn't want her to go.

Miss Mills came in. "All settled, Peter?"

"It was just a gag."

Miss Mills looked at me cleverly. "Well, whimsy will never cease, I guess. What is she? The Fairy Heliotrope from the top of the Christmas tree?"

That was when I decided I wouldn't see Nanny Ordway again, that I wouldn't call to make a "link." It was a relationship which had started for no particular reason and had no particular future. Links forged between friends! That was all kid stuff. The whole thing was pointless for both of us.

I was writing to Iris every day and she was writing back. Her mother was being difficult, feeling much grander than any of the other women at the hotel. As soon as she was quite recovered and had made some friends, Iris would leave her there and fly home, she said. I found one of her letters waiting for me at home one evening about a week later. In it, I read:

How are you getting along with your infant prodigy? Does she have a spaniel hair-do like George Eliot? I can imagine you sitting on studio couches in a smoke-filled attic, playing a phonograph you have to wind up with a handle. Go on with it, darling. It'll do you good to get a little female companionship that isn't Lottie. I have a wonderful British colonel with white mustaches down to his navel who shouts, "Good show, what?" whenever I get a backhand over the tennis net. . . .

I'm sure if it hadn't been for that letter I would never have called Nanny Ordway. But I did. I reached over for the phone and dialed, feeling amused and paternal. It was late, but she answered almost at once.

"Hello."

"Hello, Miss O'Dream. I'm just forging a link."

"Oh, Mr. Du . . . Peter, hello."

"It's disgracefully late."

"No, it isn't. I've been sitting here writing."

"Truman Capote or Somerset Maugham?"

"I don't know. Both together, I guess. It's so nice of you to call. You didn't have to."

I could picture her at the other end of the phone, curled up on one of the studio couches, her hair flopping over her face. Suddenly, it all seemed so pleasant, so harmless—like Iris's white-mustached colonel.

"Good show, what?" I said.

"What, Peter? What did you say?"

"Nothing. I just called."

"I'm glad."

I thought of the dreary little room, the lingering kitchen smells from supper. Suddenly my cosmic feeling of pity was back.

"How about dinner tomorrow? You showed me the Village. I'll show you how the rich live. Only fair, isn't it?"

She didn't answer for a while. At last she said, "Peter, do you really mean it?"

"Of course I mean it. Seven o'clock at my place?"

"All right, Peter. Good night. Pleasant dreams."

She hung up on me. I went to sleep.

I had some business to settle next afternoon. It was six fifteen before I realized I would be later than I thought. Since she was to come to my place at seven, I called Nanny but there was no answer. It was almost seven twenty when I got back to the apartment. Nanny Ordway was sitting cross-legged on the floor outside my front door. She had the old tweed coat over her arm but she was wearing an evening dress—a pale-blue strapless affair.

"I'm terribly sorry," I said. "I called to let you know I'd be late but you'd already left."

She got up, smiling. "I imagined it was something like that." She twisted around in front of me. "Will this do? I don't own an evening dress. I borrowed it from my roommate. People do wear evening dresses, don't they, when they go to grand places, or is it only in the movies?"

The dress was all covered in little bows, the sort of thing a stuffy Boston debutante would have "come out" in several years ago at the Ritz. But she had a pretty neck and lovely shoulders. And somehow the wrongness of the dress touched me.

"You look fine," I said.

"Oh, well, it doesn't matter really."

I was getting out my key when Brian came running down the stairs from the floor above. When he saw us, he stopped dead. "Hello, Peter." He glanced at Nanny. "Hello."

He looked awkward as if he'd caught me out in something I wouldn't want to be caught out in. "Lottie's gone off to the theater. I just thought we might have a drink. That is, if you weren't doing anything. I thought . . . but, never mind." He started tactfully back up the stairs.

I let Nanny into the apartment. Her eyes were shining.

"It's lovely! And the phonograph—it's wonderful. What nonsense I talked about being poor. If I lived here, I'd sit here by the window all day and I'd write. I'd write . . ."

She walked around the room, examining everything, her long blue skirt rustling clumsily.

"That was Charlotte Marin's husband, wasn't it?"

"It was."

"Did he mind?"

"Mind?"

"About me. She—Charlotte Marin—minded at the party."

"There's nothing to mind about, anyway."

"Of course there isn't. It's just that people . . . Are we really going somewhere expensive and glittering for dinner?"

"Anywhere you like."

We went to Voisin, which I don't normally do and can't normally afford. But now the evening had happened, I figured I might as well do it in style. She was really very intelligent. She missed nothing. It was extraordinary what good company she was. We lingered over dinner and then we went to the Ruban Bleu. We left about one thirty and we were near home. It seemed quite natural to ask her in for a nightcap. She said, Yes, she'd come if we could play Welitch's *Salomé*. I had it, she knew. She'd seen it on the shelf.

We played the Welitch *Salomé*. I didn't want to give it much volume because it was late. But the jangled, disturbing music filled the apartment. She listened, rapt, the way she had done in her own apartment. When it was over, she said:

"That's the way I would like to write. Just like that. That sort of mood." She paused and then quoted softly: "*Das Geheimnis der Liebe ist grosser als das Geheimnis des Todes*. It's corny, maybe, but if you could do it right in a story!"

"Translate."

"*The secret of love*," she said, "*is greater than the secret of death*."

She looked so young and solemn that I grinned. "Treated à la Somerset Capote."

"Don't!" Her voice was suddenly fierce. "Don't kid me all the time. Don't!"

"I'm sorry."

She turned to me and put out her hand impulsively. "Oh, Peter, I'm such a pig. And you're so—so *good* to me. And *for* me," she added slowly. "It was only seeing your beautiful place, and the thought of it just being there all day, with nobody in it, nobody using it. If only"—and now the words came out in a rush—"if only I could use it for a few hours. I couldn't disturb anybody. I could let myself in and be gone long before you got home. . . ."

"Let yourself in?" I said slowly, and the reluctance in my voice took all the light out of her face. She sat down, drooping.

I thought of her as she had been earlier that evening, sitting right there where she was sitting now, looking up at me enraptured, by the beauty of the view, the apartment, the phonograph—everything. I felt a heel that I should have the place and hardly ever use it except to sleep, while she, with her determination to be a Great Writer, had to work jammed in a single room with another girl. Now I'd poked fun at her and she was young enough to be sensitive. I wanted to make amends.

I said, "Why don't you bring your work up here in the mornings? You're right, it wouldn't interfere with me. I'm always out by ten."

She swung around. "No," she said. "No."

"Why not?" I went to the desk and brought out a duplicate key. "Here. Let yourself in. I'll explain to the maid. She gets down every morning from Lottie's around ten thirty or eleven."

She looked at the key as if it were a pigeon-blood ruby. Her hand went out to it, went back and then out again, taking it from me. Tears started to form in her eyes.

"I didn't think . . . I never really dreamed . . ."

"Forget it. Play the phonograph. Do anything you like to get in the mood."

She got up, still clutching the key. "I'll never be able . . ." The words choked up into a sob. She ran out of the apartment and closed the door behind her.

I didn't follow to say good night.


CHAPTER 3

AFTER she had left, I felt relaxed and contented as if I had been a remarkably generous guy. Soon I sat down at the desk and started my nightly letter to Iris. I had planned to tell her all about Nanny and the key but somehow it didn't come out right in words. Finally I made no mention of it at all.

Next morning I had breakfast with the Marins. Lottie was silent and portentous. I suspected that Brian had told her about meeting Nanny and me outside the front door, and the fact that she didn't accuse me of moral depravity right there and then meant that she was taking it very heavily and was "waiting for the right moment." It was obvious that I would have to have things out with her sooner or later, but I, too, decided to wait for the right moment. I slipped out into the kitchen and told Lucia, the daily woman, about Nanny. Lucia was fond of me and had Lottie's number. I gave her ten dollars, saying it would cover any extra work Nanny might cause and asked her not to men-

tion it at all to Lottie. She understood and grinned.

I left for the office at quarter of ten. When I got back that evening, everything was neat as a nun, but propped up against the pile of Iris's letters on the desk I found a little kid's drawing in ink. This time it was of a girl with hair tumbling over her face, sitting at a desk typing. Under it was typed:



Truman Capote thanks you;
Somerset Maugham thanks you;
I thank you.

Truman Capote thanks you;
Somerset Maugham thanks you;
I thank you.

The next day Miss Mills brought me a script that had

come through the mail from an English professor in Ann Arbor. The moment I'd read it, I knew it was what I had been looking for. *Let Live* was its title. It was amusing and professional and inexpensive to produce, with only one set and a cast of six. From then on, the office was geared up for an immediate production. I started working like a dog and coming home late. I never saw Nanny for a week or ten days, but every evening on my return there'd be a little picture.

They always gave me a kick. They kept Nanny in my mind, but she was never in the apartment when I got home.

One evening around six thirty as I came home from the office, I ran into Lottie and Brian in the apartment-house foyer. Without thinking, I invited them in. As I let them in the front door, I suddenly thought: Nanny! But it was all right. She had left.

There was another rather bad moment, however, when Lottie, always on the prowl, stopped at the desk and picked something up. "Whatever is this meant to be?"

She was studying Nanny's daily drawing. This time it was of a girl dancing with wild abandon. Under it was typed: *Triumphphant Dance of Female Genius*.

I said, probably with a great deal too much nonchalance, "Oh, one of the stenographers from the office was here this afternoon doing the household checks. I guess she got carried away."

The gimlet gaze bored into me as Lottie dropped the drawing back on the desk. "Well!" she said.

But she left it at that.

And then, about a week later, I went home early from the office—around six. There was an opening and I had two tickets. I had been planning to take Alec Ryder, but he had flown to Chicago to check up on the touring company of one of his plays. When I let myself into the apartment, I heard the phonograph. I went into the living room and there was Nanny sitting at the desk by the window, tapping away on a beat-up old typewriter that she must have brought with her.

When she saw me, she got up almost guiltily.

"Mercy, I lost all track of time. I'm sorry. I . . ."

I was delighted to see her. "Hi," I said, "how about coming to the theater tonight? I have an extra seat for an opening."

She was worried about her clothes. She was wearing an old dirndl and a blouse with a scarlet chiffon scarf knotted at her

throat. It was all wrong for an opening. That was the first time I realized she was about the same size as Iris. I went into the bedroom and picked out one of my wife's evening dresses. It was one she'd never liked very much, but I thought it would look good on Nanny. I gave it to her. She stayed in the bedroom quite a long time; then she called me in.

Nanny was quite transformed. She'd fixed up her face. It was the first time I'd seen her with make-up. The difference was remarkable. She still wasn't pretty, but she was intriguing-looking. It wasn't the type of allure for me, but I was very aware of it, which was more than Nanny seemed to be. She acted as if there was no change in her appearance at all.

We went to Sardi's for dinner, then on to the play. It wasn't much—one of those comedies about how a wise wife clings to her intemperate husband against high odds. There was a party afterward for the company but I didn't feel like going. Since Nanny had to change into her own clothes, we went back to the apartment.

We started to talk about the play and, because of the play, about married love. Nanny thought the play was stupid. If a man loved his wife, he wouldn't run around with other women, and if he did run around with other women, he wouldn't go back and be in love with his wife all over again. She was very earnest about it. She was Nanny Ordway, the great twenty-year-old psychological author who knew the whole pitch on *The Secret of Love*.

She put down her lemonade glass. "Well," she said, "it could never be that way with me. Patched up, compromised. No—never." And then: "Isn't it funny?"

"What?"

"You and me—being friends when we're so different."

"It isn't funny."

"You'll forget me when your wife comes back."

"Of course I won't."

After I'd said that I realized it wasn't true. Once Iris was back, I'd probably forget Nanny Ordway in a week. Maybe I had been a selfish, stupid male, using her unfeelingly as a salve for my temporary loneliness.

My insincerity had made me ashamed. Somehow or other, Nanny Ordway always ended up by making me ashamed. I

leaned over and kissed her on the cheek, feeling a little like Judas. It was the first time I'd kissed her. Her skin was dry, not very attractive.

"I won't forget you," I said. "Iris will want to know you, too."

She got up quickly as if the kiss had been a wrong note. She glanced at her watch.

"Heavens, it's late. I'd better change back to my own dress."

She went into the bedroom and stayed there a while. Then she came out in her old dirndl and blouse and her scarlet knotted scarf. She went to the desk and picked up her typewriter.

I took her to the elevator. With her typewriter and her old tweed coat, she looked like a shabby little stenographer. The elevator man cast her only a bored, sleepy glance. My feeling of guilt stirred again. I smiled and waved.

"Good night, Miss O'Dream. Do good work."

"Oh, I will. You can depend on that."

All next morning I worked at the office. The deal with Thomas Wood, the author of *Let Live*, had been completed by now and I even had most of the production money lined up. I was reaching the casting stage and someone had recommended a minor Hollywood character actor for one of the big male roles. I had never seen him on the screen. I discovered he was playing in an old movie at one of the Forty-second Street houses. After lunch, I went to take a look at his performance.

I liked him and thought he might do. I went back to the office around four o'clock to send a telegram to his agent in Hollywood. When I got there, Miss Mills brought me a cable from Iris. She was arriving at Idlewild at six o'clock that evening.

I was overjoyed. I made a couple of calls canceling business dates so that I could meet her at the airport.

The plane was ten minutes late. Many people suffer torments when someone they love is flying. But I was never that way about Iris. She was so real to me that the idea of anything destroying the reality was inconceivable. The plane appeared and landed. The moment I saw her it was as if she had never been away.

I got her into a taxi. She was looking wonderful, but then she always did. She had one of those faces, with large eyes and perfectly constructed bones, which nothing can damage. Sometimes I wished she was less beautiful, less in the public domain. But that evening I felt only pride and contentment.

Iris was in fine spirits, amusing about the white-mustached British colonel whom she had skillfully switched to her mother. That was why she had felt she could leave her safely alone. She was interested about *Let Live*, and full of questions about Lottie.

"Is she still our best friend?"

"I'm afraid so. I've been having breakfast in bed with her and Brian every morning."

"Oh, dear, I was hoping you'd mortally offended her by now. Does she know I'm coming back?"

"I had Miss Mills call. She'll be keening around the apartment like a banshee if I know Lottie. It's been tough for her with only Brian and me to supervise."

"Dear Lottie!"

"Alec Ryder's going to be pestering you to do that show in London," I said.

"Don't worry. I'm settling down for a year's run as a wife."

I hadn't really expected that Alec's offer would interest her, but that made my happiness complete.

She put her hand on my arm. "By the way, what happened to your girl genius? You stopped writing about her."

"Oh, Nanny Ordway? She's around."

"I'm dying to meet her."

"You'll see her soon," I said.

"Is she writing a play or something? Is that why you're interested in her?"

"Not exactly." I added with cowardice, "She's not very exciting."

Iris looked at me quickly. "Don't apologize, darling. I didn't want her to be exciting."

We'd crawled through the evening mid-town traffic and arrived at Sutton Place. The doorman and Bill, on the evening elevator shift, were pleased to see Iris. We reached our floor and I heard the phonograph playing inside. Bill carried Iris's suitcases to the door. I said:

"Okay. I'll take them in."

He went back to the elevator. Iris said, "Why's the phonograph playing? You don't suppose Lottie's putting on some frightful home-coming production?"

The phonograph was playing *Salomé*. I knew who was there and I felt very silly. I tried to be nonchalant bringing out my key.

"It's probably just Nanny."

"Nanny?" Iris looked blank. "Nanny Ordway?"

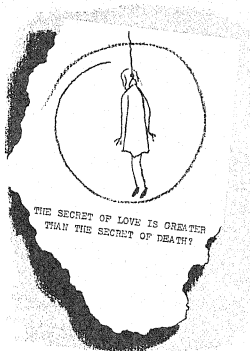
"I've been letting her write here while I'm at the office. She lives in a terrible dreary room in the Village. Maybe I'm a dope. I'll explain later."

I opened the door. For some reason Iris stood back and let me go in first.

Nanny's typewriter was on the desk, but she wasn't in the living room. The phonograph was going full blast. Salomé was screaming her lungs out over John the Baptist's severed head.

Iris picked up a piece of paper that was propped on the desk. "Whatever is this?"

Those damn drawings! I took it from her. This time it was a kid's circle-and-line sketch in ink of a girl hanging by the neck from a rope. Under it was typed in block capitals:



THE SECRET OF LOVE IS GREATER THAN THE SECRET OF DEATH?

It was the sort of joke that had seemed cute with Nanny. Now it seemed extremely embarrassing. I dropped it back on the desk.

"It's just one of the fool drawings Nanny makes," I said.

"How very strange. Peter, would you mind turning down the phonograph. I feel as if John the Baptist's hair was in my mouth."

"Nanny's probably in the bathroom," I said.

I turned off the phonograph. Then I picked up Iris's suitcases and carried them toward the bedroom. The bathroom door was open and Nanny wasn't inside. Iris followed me into the bedroom. We both stopped on the threshold.

Nanny Ordway was there.

Her red chiffon scarf was knotted around her neck and she was dangling by it from the metal stem of the chandelier.

I FELT sick in the stomach but my mind was very clear. Close behind me, I heard Iris gasp.

I said, "Get Dr. Norris on the phone."

I put down the suitcases and ran to the kitchen. I found a carving knife in a drawer and ran back with it to the bedroom. I picked up the chair that had been kicked over under Nanny, climbed on it and cut the scarf loose from the chandelier. She fell the few feet to the ground with a thud like a sack.

I knelt down at her side. I tried to loosen the knot in the scarf at the nape of her neck but I couldn't free it with my fingers. Finally I frayed the scarf through with the knife.

I could hear Iris on the bedside phone. Dr. Norris was our physician and he lived in the next apartment house.

Her voice sounded steadier than mine would have been. I looked down at Nanny Ordway. Her face was a dreadful purplish gray. There was a deep red furrow around her neck where the scarf had bitten into the flesh. All I was thinking was:

Nanny Ordway's committed suicide. Everyone's going to say she killed herself because of me.

Iris crossed to my side. "He's coming right away—Dr. Norris."

I looked up at her. I desperately needed some token to show that she was not going to condemn me. She must have guessed part of what I was feeling. She put her hand on my shoulder. My hand went up to cover hers. It was as if the floor between us had been splitting in an earthquake and she, somehow, with her hand on my shoulder, had miraculously managed to make it firm again.

There was a sharp rat-tat at the front door. We both ran to let in Dr. Norris. Lottie, with Brian behind her, exploded across the threshold. She was wearing an elaborate black cocktail dress dripping with pearls.

"Iris, baby." Her arms, with a metallic clatter of bracelets, swooped around Iris's neck. "Welcome home, angel. Quick. Upstairs. Champagne before I go to the theater. And then dinner for you two with Brian. He's fixed it all. It's his party. It . . ."

She broke off, the gimlet gaze spreading from Iris's face to mine. "What's the matter? What's happened?"

I glanced instinctively back toward the bedroom.

"Get out, Lottie. Please get out."

"What is it?" She took a step into the room.

"Lottie!"

She pushed past me and hurried toward the bedroom. Neither Iris nor I moved. Then, in the bedroom, Lottie screamed. Brian dashed forward. Iris and I followed. Lottie was standing over Nanny Ordway. She was twisting at the pearls around her throat, as if people actually did that outside of a play.

"Peter, she's killed herself! The poor little creature! You played around with her just because you were lonely. You turned her head. You . . ."

"Shut up, Lottie," said Iris.

A knock sounded again at the front door. I went back to answer it. Dr. Norris came hurrying in.

He went with me into the bedroom. He looked down at Nanny and then at the rest of us. "Yes," he said. "I think, if you please, you should all go into the other room."

In a few minutes, Dr. Norris put his head around the door.

"I'm afraid she's dead. I recommend that one of you call the police immediately."

The news galvanized Lottie. Instantly she hurried toward the phone, eager to start things, to have the disaster go on.

Brian went after her. "Better let me do it, Lottie."

Lottie picked up the receiver. I crossed and took it from her. At least I had that much pride.

"Get me the police."

When I was connected, I said, "This is Peter Duluth." I gave the address. "You'd better send someone over right away. A girl's killed herself."

My voice sounded all right, but when I dropped the receiver back onto the stand my hand was shaking. Iris went straight to the bar and mixed me a Scotch and water. She mixed one for herself and one for Brian, too.

"Lottie," she said, "it's after seven thirty. You've got to go to the theater."

"The theater. The theater!" Lottie had plunged into one of her routines. "How can I? How can I go to the theater?"

"Troupers," I said. "They go bravely on with the show, hissing through stiff upper lips, remember?"

She swung around to me. "But, Peter, how can I leave you in this ghastly situation? How can I do it?" She clutched me and

kissed me with extravagant affection. "Darling, you mustn't worry. Promise me not to worry. I won't say a word to the police. You can depend on that. Oh, how could you have done it? How could you have let this happen? I warned you. Didn't I warn you? A little girl, a mere child . . ."

"Lottie dear," said Iris, "please go."

"Oh, I'm going." Of course she was going. She was beginning to realize how she could knock them all dead at the theater with the great news.

She started in a hawklike swoop for the door. Brian followed her. "I'd better see she gets there okay." He looked pale and shaken but he patted my arm. "That's my boy, Peter. I'll come right back from the theater. If you want me, I'll be upstairs."

He followed Lottie out of the apartment and closed the door. I had been dreading the moment when I'd be alone with Iris. Not because I was afraid she'd judge me. But, so long as Lottie had been there making a fool of herself, the time for explaining had been postponed. Now, I would have to explain. And how could I—when I couldn't understand it myself, when all that I felt was bafflement and panic and an obscure guilt sense which nagged that I deserved whatever punishment was coming to me.

Iris lit a cigarette. She hadn't looked tired when she got off the plane. But now she did—tired and almost her age, which was thirty-four. Seeing her suffer and knowing it was my doing made me suddenly, unreasonably angry.

"Okay, she's dead," I said. "She's killed herself. There it is. We're stuck with it. Lottie thinks it's my fault. The police will say it's my fault. So what—who cares?"

Iris looked at me. "Peter, don't be stupid. Who do you think you're talking to? Just tell me the truth."

"The truth? I saw her a couple of times. I thought she was a nice enough kid. She amused me. She was someone to be with. I guess I was sorry for her. I gave her the key. I let her bring her work here. Okay. I suppose I was going paternal and senile in my old age. But there it is. That was the setup. Now she's killed herself. Who's going to believe me?"

Iris came to me. "I'll believe you."

Saying that so quickly and simply, she took me off my guard. My anger fizzled out. Without it, I felt rudderless. "You . . . you . . ."

"You wouldn't lie to me." She paused. "But she fell in love with you?"

Suddenly I found I didn't have to be affected about it. I could talk naturally. That was what she'd done for me.

"I don't think so. She never showed the slightest sign. Why should she have fallen in love with me? It wasn't ever on that level. Besides, from the beginning she knew all about you, that I was in love with you. We were always talking about you."

"You didn't even kiss her?"

"Yes. I kissed her—once, because . . . Hell, I can't remember why. But it wasn't anything."

"It wasn't? Not for a young impressionable girl who . . ."

I put my hand on her arm. "Baby, can't you tell? Isn't there some way? Can't you see, feel that there's nothing changed, that I love you, that I couldn't be making things up?"

Her dark, steady eyes watched me. "I believe you. And if you say so, I believe she wasn't in love with you, either." She crossed to the desk and picked up Nanny's sketch of the hanging girl. I could tell she was making a great effort to be calm—to help me. "And this?"

"She always made little drawings. I told you. It was a kind of running gag. When I saw it, I thought it just meant that her writing hadn't been going well today. I . . ."

"The secret of love is greater than the secret of death."

"Okay. I know what it sounds like, but it's a quote from *Salomé*. She was using it for the title of a story. That was a kind of running gag, too. We seemed to go in for gags, didn't we? Laugh? Never laughed so much in our lives!"

Iris dropped the drawing and leafed through a pile of manuscript pages which Nanny must have left. "What about her parents? We'll have to phone them or something, won't we?"

"I don't know anything about them. I just know that she lived in the Village with another girl."

Iris turned from the desk. Very quietly, she said, "I don't think the police are going to believe all this, do you?"

"No."

"Then we'll just have to hope for the best."

She crossed back to me. I put my arms around her. But I didn't dare kiss her. I was afraid, if I did, I might break down and cry like a child.

CHAPTER 4

DR. NORRIS emerged from the bedroom then. He was wearing a subdued version of his crisp, everything's-going-to-be-all-right smile.

"Well, Peter, you called the police?"

"Yes."

"Fine. I'm afraid she'd been dead for some time. No chance to have saved her. Most unfortunate for you both."

Iris said, "I suppose there are no complications?"

"About the suicide? The pressure marks of the ligature seem a little atypical. But that's hardly my line. Let's leave that to the police, shall we?"

I didn't know what that meant, but it sounded ominous. Dr. Norris glanced at the gold watch on his neat wrist.

In about ten minutes the police arrived—four of them, three plain-clothes detectives and a uniformed officer. The chief of the detectives was tall and young with a very soft voice. He and the officer went almost immediately into the bedroom with Dr. Norris. The other two detectives started to prowl around the living room. Iris showed one of them Nanny's drawing. He took it, Nanny's manuscript and Nanny's typewriter, retreating with them into the bedroom. Soon I was called in after him. I had to describe how Nanny had been hanging, how the scarf had been before I cut it. Then I was sent back to the living room.

Another man was arriving, big and red-faced, with a black bag. I could tell he was an assistant medical examiner.

In a few minutes, the young, tall detective came out of the bedroom. He looked about thirty-five and he moved very quietly, giving an impression of calm. He was good-looking, with a certain ascetic quality to his unobtrusive features and gray eyes. He reminded me of a Jesuit priest who was a friend of mine—the cleverest man I knew.

I wondered if it was going to make it better or worse that he was obviously not a straight tough cop.

He came over to us as if he were meeting us at a cocktail party. "My name is Trant—Lieutenant Trant of the Homicide Bureau. You're Mr. Duluth, a producer and director in the theater." His

gaze, unsmiling but not hostile, shifted to Iris. "I've seen you, Mrs. Duluth, in the movies and on the stage. Often."

He glanced at a chair, waiting for Iris's permission to sit. She nodded. He drew the chair up close to us and sat down. I thought: It's going to be worse with him than with a regular cop—much worse. He said, "Just a few questions. First, the girl's name?"

"Nanny Ordway."

"She was living here with you?"

"No. She lived at 31 Charlton Street in the Village."

He took out an old envelope, scribbled the name and address on its back, and returned it to his pocket. "Who discovered her?"

"We both did. My wife's just back from Jamaica. I'd been to the airport to meet her. When we got here just after seven we found her."

"I see. And how did she happen to be in your apartment?"

"She had a key. She came every day—to write."

"Something for you—a play?"

"No. Just writing. She was only beginning. Hadn't had anything published."

"I see." He said that again in his quiet, pleasant, unassuming voice. "And why did she have a key and do her writing here, Mr. Duluth?"

"I gave her the key. She was living down there in the Village with another girl. The conditions weren't any too good for writing. This place was empty all day. It was more convenient for her to come here." I was still hoping he was intelligent enough to accept it at its face value—because, after all, it was true.

He said, "When did you give Miss Ordway the key, Mr. Duluth?"

"About a week, ten days ago."

"You have known her a long time?"

"Just about four or five weeks."

Iris put in, "He met her the day I left for Jamaica. He wrote me about it."

Lieutenant Trant's courteous gaze shifted to her and then came back to me. I was so attuned to him by then that I could read his thoughts. He was already thinking: So. This is one of those setups where the noble wife sticks by the erring husband. He was missing the point. I felt angry as if he had insulted Iris out loud. It was a help to feel angry with him. It put me on the offensive.

"Where did you meet her, Mr. Duluth?"

"At a party at Charlotte Marin's. She and her husband live in the apartment above. They asked me up to a party—the day my wife left for Jamaica. I met Nanny Ordway there."

"She was a friend of Charlotte Marin and her husband?"

"No. Some other people had brought her to the party. They didn't know her."

"What people?"

"I don't know."

Lieutenant Trant said, "And after you'd met her, you saw a great deal of her?"

"No. That night I took her out to Hamburger Heaven because she was hungry. I walked her to the subway. After that, I had dinner once at her place. She came once to the office. I took her to dinner once—no, twice. Those were the only times I saw her."

"I see." Lieutenant Trant watched me. "Are you in the habit of giving keys to young girls whom you hardly know?"

My anger broke through the surface.

"Damn it, you don't have to be clever and try to trip me up. If there'd been anything physical or romantic between Nanny Ordway and myself, I'd have told you. I was trying to be kind to her. That's all. I'm only interested in telling you the truth because finding the truth is supposed to be your job. And I'm not going to have motives attributed to me that don't exist."

"And while we're on the subject, Lieutenant," put in Iris, "you might as well know that my husband and I are not giddy members of the International Set. We happen to be an ordinary, fairly solid married couple who love each other."

I felt a warm rush of gratitude to Iris, but Lieutenant Trant's only reaction was a sudden, rather mechanical smile.

He took a Manila envelope from his pocket. Out of it, holding it by one corner, he brought Nanny Ordway's last sketch.

"Does this seem to you to be a suicide note?"

"I don't know what it seems to me to be. She always left me a note every day with a drawing on it, and some kind of a crack."

"You have the other notes?"

I tried to remember. "No. I don't think so. I think I always tore them up." I thought of the first note of all—the girl sitting at the telephone with the phone number floating above. I had taken it to the office. I had put it in my wallet. I took out my wallet.

The drawing was there. I handed it to Lieutenant Trant. "This is the first one. I kept it for the phone number."

"The phone number?" Lieutenant Trant took it and put it down on his knee. He glanced at it and then back to the other one in his hand. "A hanging girl. *The secret of love is greater than the secret of death.* A query has been added after the word *death*. Doesn't that suggest suicide, Mr. Duluth?"

"*The secret of love*—that's a quote from *Salomé*. She was writing a story with that as its theme."

"Nevertheless, doesn't it suggest suicide? And can you suggest any motive for suicide other than an unsuccessful affair with a married man?"

"I hardly knew her. I told you that. There was her writing. Maybe she was discouraged about her writing."

"But she's dead in *your* apartment, Mr. Duluth. If she'd had some motive for committing suicide which did not concern you, would she have embarrassed you by using your apartment to hang herself in? Or are the conditions in the Village as little convenient for hanging as for writing?"

I looked back at him, wondering dimly where he came from. This wasn't at all typecasting for a detective. His face was quite secular and modern, really, but I couldn't escape that medieval priestly impression. A young Inquisitor, maybe?

"Mr. Duluth, did Miss Ordway seem like a neurotic girl?"

"No more than anyone else."

"The whole thing is a complete mystery to you?"

"A complete mystery."

Dr. Norris came out of the bedroom then. He gave me his cold cheerful smile as he hurried toward the door.

"So long, Peter. If there's anything the wife or I can do—just give us a buzz." He waved at Iris. "Good night. Good luck."

Lieutenant Trant got up and went back to the bedroom. Two white-coated attendants with a stretcher came in the front door and disappeared into the bedroom too.

Soon Lieutenant Trant came out again. This time he didn't sit down. His manner was obscurely more official. "Mr. Duluth, I wonder if you'd tell me where you were this afternoon."

"I left the office about five to go to the airport."

"And before that?"

"I went to a movie."

"Movie?"

"I'm casting a play. There's a Hollywood actor I'm interested in. He was playing in a movie in one of those Forty-second Street houses. I went there to see him."

"What was this movie?"

"*Happy Ending*. That was its improbable title."

"You went alone?"

"That's right—alone."

Lieutenant Trant was shifting his balance from one foot to the other. "I suppose you won't object to coming around to the station house to make a statement?"

"Of course not."

Iris got up. "I'll come, too." She picked up the coat she had dropped in a chair by the door when we came in from the airport. "Do you mind if I ask you one thing, Lieutenant?"

"Of course not. Go ahead."

"Why do you want to know where my husband was this afternoon? What difference does it make?"

"I'm afraid we're nosy, Mrs. Duluth."

"But if it's suicide . . ." She paused and added very quietly, "It is suicide, isn't it, Lieutenant?"

Lieutenant Trant's answering voice was just as quiet and just as casual. "Oh, I expect so, Mrs. Duluth. The Medical Examiner's office will have to decide that. The pressure marks around the neck look normal enough, but both the assistant M.E. and Dr. Norris noticed certain discrepancies. Meanwhile, however, we always keep an open mind until we're sure, Mrs. Duluth. An open mind. Suicide . . . murder . . ."

CHAPTER 5

WE DROVE with Lieutenant Trant to the station house. I'd never been there before and I hadn't realized it was so near. It was hard to grasp the fact that, all the time we had been living with reasonable peacefulness in our apartment, other people's difficulties, sufferings, tragedies had been reaching some sort of climax only a stone's throw away. A sorting house for anger, frayed nerves and despair—and I had passed it indifferently almost every day.

We climbed some stairs to the Detectives' Room, where Lieutenant Trant took us over to a young man sitting at a desk.

"Jim, take a statement from Mrs. Duluth. Discovery of body, presumed suicide."

The young man's eyes widened. "Gee, Iris Duluth."

"That's right. Go get her something to eat if she wants it. She's going to wait for her husband." He smiled again at Iris. "When you're through, maybe she'll give you her autograph."

He beckoned to another detective. We left Iris at the desk and the three of us went into an adjoining office.

The other detective had a shorthand machine. He sat down by the door. Lieutenant Trant took the swivel chair behind the neat desk.

"All right, Mr. Duluth. First a simple statement covering the discovery of the body. Then a second statement giving in detail the whole history of your relationship with Miss Ordway. Mention any people and their addresses who can corroborate it." He paused, watching me with that polite gaze which wasn't actually hostile but suggested hostility. "Needless to say, you're not under arrest. There's nothing to arrest you for and there's no reason in the world why you should give the second statement at the present time if you don't want to."

"I want to."

I gave both statements. I no longer bothered about how it all sounded. I just detailed everything which had happened between Nanny Ordway and myself as accurately as I could.

The only corroborative witnesses I could think of were Lottie and Brian, Miss Mills, who had seen Nanny once at the office, and Lucia, the maid, who presumably had been seeing her every day working in the apartment. I knew Miss Mills's address, and I happened to have Lucia's in my pocket address book. The whole thing took about an hour.

When I had finished, Lieutenant Trant dismissed the detective. "Start getting them typed up, Sam. Mr. Duluth can read them through and sign them tomorrow."

I said, "Well—what now?"

Surprisingly, Lieutenant Trant smiled. It was quite a wonderful face when he smiled. He could have been in the movies. Only in the movies he wouldn't have been playing a cop. He'd have been a doctor, maybe, or a young scientist dedicated to the



pursuit of some noble end. "There's nothing now, Mr. Duluth. Nothing—at present. I'd like you to come in tomorrow at ten. We may know a little more then."

I said, "Just exactly what is my status?"

"Your status? At the moment, Mr. Duluth, you are just a man implicated in the suicide of a girl and, of course, it is not a criminal offense to have been acquainted with a suicide. Once the M.E.'s office has established the fact of suicide, you will merely be a witness. On the other hand, of course, if the M.E.'s office is not satisfied with the evidence . . ."

He let the sentence drop there and got up holding out his hand. "You'd better rescue your wife from her fans. Tomorrow at ten?"

I took his hand. I realized that the possibility of murder had to be considered at this stage. I knew that it would soon evaporate. But I also knew that, if Lieutenant Trant ever thought I was guilty of any crime punishable by law, he would track me to the ends of the earth. It was a peculiar sensation shaking his hand.

I walked out into the squad room. Iris was sitting at one of the desks with a paper coffee cup in her hand. A couple of detectives



were standing around her—and three other men. When they saw me, the three men hurried toward me. Iris got up, looking at me anxiously. I knew what the men were, of course, and I was as ready as I would ever be for them.

The reporters bombarded me with questions.

"Was she an actress?"

"No."

"A personal friend—a close personal friend?"

"Just a girl." I pushed past them to Iris. I was feeling dead beat now.

"How'd she come to be strung up in your bedroom? Mr. Du-luth, give us a break, will you?"

"Skip it. You can get it all from the cops anyway." I took Iris's arm and hurried down the stairs.

We reached our apartment house about eleven thirty. The night porter knew; the night elevator man knew, too. Neither of them said anything, but you could tell. There was a whole new feeling. I was a goldfish in a bowl. They were peering in through the glass.

The lights were all on in the living room. There weren't any visible policemen. I heard someone in the bedroom though. Then Miss Mills emerged.

Miss Mills was no beauty. She was plump and rather pig-faced and she wore a pair of rimless pince-nez on a gold chain which emphasized the snout effect of her nose. But it never occurred to you to want her changed. That was the way Miss Mills always had been and always would be.

She came to us with her usual self-assured smile. She was the most comforting thing I'd seen that evening. "Hello. Dear Lottie told me the news. I came right around. There were a lot of cops messing about, but I talked them into letting me stay. They've just left, thank heaven, and I've straightened up a bit."

She kissed Iris. "You must be beat from the plane and everything. You're both coming to my place to sleep. There's no point in spending a creepy night here, and Lottie would grab you for upstairs anyway, which is a fate worse than *et cetera*."

I don't know how Miss Mills always seemed able to strike the right note in the least likely manner.

"I've packed an overnight bag for you, Peter. Iris's suitcases hadn't been unpacked. Shall we go right away?"

The phone rang. She went to answer it. "Sorry, no comment." She slammed down the receiver. "Damn newspapermen. That's the fifteenth time."

Miss Mills picked up one of Iris's suitcases and my overnight bag. She was standing by the door.

"Come on," she said. "Let's go."

Miss Mills's apartment on East Sixty-fourth Street was small, but its very smallness and spinsterish chintzy quality encouraged a mood of coziness and safety. Miss Mills scrambled some eggs and made us eat them with glasses of milk. Then she sent us to bed. She'd made up a bed for herself on the studio couch in the living room. Iris and I had the bedroom.

I took my wife in my arms. The warmth and comfort of her was something I had almost forgotten, something to which, obscurely, I felt I had no right. I felt shy with her and very unhappy.

I said, because I had to, "You do believe me, don't you?"

"Yes, Peter, I believe you."

"If there had been anything between Nanny and . . ."

"Don't talk about it, darling. There's no need."

WHEN IRIS and I got up next morning, Miss Mills was cooking breakfast in the kitchenette and all the morning newspapers were piled on a coffee table in the living room. "Might as well read your reviews and get them over with," she called.

The coverage of Nanny Ordway's death was more or less what I'd expected it to be. The *Times* had the episode buried where it belonged, in a short column on a middle page. But the less sedate publications had gone to town. One of them displayed a photograph of Iris and me, kissing at the airport, blown up on the front page under a banner headline: IRIS DULUTH FINDS DEAD GIRL. IN HUSBAND'S BEDROOM.

I glanced through several of the accounts. There was no photograph of Nanny. They had nothing except the basic fact of her death and discovery, but they played it to the hilt with as many unsavory innuendoes as their legal departments had okayed.

Iris was determined that we should move back to the apartment. We'd have to sooner or later. Sooner was better, she thought, like getting back on a horse after it had thrown you. I agreed with her. Once we'd eaten and dressed, we all went our separate ways—Iris back to face the apartment alone, Miss Mills to hold down the office, I to the station house and Lieutenant Trant.

As I walked down Madison Avenue through the crisp November sunshine, I was surprised at my relative serenity. No one recognized me as the monster of the headlines. Nothing in the familiar sights around me indicated change. I had conquered my night fears. Of course Nanny Ordway had not been in love with me, and I had nothing for which to blame myself.

I went into the station house, if not cheerfully, at least with a feeling of detachment, as if I were only a temporary interloper in its world of distress and doom.

I was taken upstairs through the Detectives' Room to the same office of the night before. Lieutenant Trant came in soon carrying a sheaf of papers. I was surprised at the strength of my antagonism to him. He was so quiet, so polite.

"Good morning, Mr. Duluth. Here are the typescripts of the statements you made last night. Care to look them over? Excuse me a moment. I'll be right with you."

He went away, leaving the typewritten sheets on the desk. I read the two statements through three times to make sure they were correct. There it was all neatly typed up for the files—the

sum total of my anomalous acquaintance with Nanny Ordway. There was nothing I could add, nothing I could subtract.

Eventually Lieutenant Trant came back and sat down behind the desk opposite me. "Statements all right, Mr. Duluth?"

"They're all right."

"They represent the truth and the whole truth of your association with Nanny Ordway?"

"They do."

"There had been nothing between you—no love passages—nothing which could have caused her to kill herself in your apartment."

"So we're back to that again."

"Yes, we are."

"There was nothing between us—no love passages—nothing which could have caused her to kill herself in my apartment."

Lieutenant Trant pressed a buzzer on his desk. A cop put his head around the door. "Ask Miss Amberley to step in, will you?"

The cop went away and came back with a girl, letting her through the door and closing it behind her. She was a tall girl about twenty-eight years old. She was dowdily dressed with an old tweed coat like Nanny's and black ballet slippers. She wasn't attractive. She had the eccentric look of a girl from a social family who was making it her lifework to live down her background.

"Miss Amberley," said Lieutenant Trant, "this is Mr. Duluth."

The girl barely inclined her head. Her rather prominent green eyes, shifting to me for a second, were filled with disgust. There is no other, less violent word to describe their expression. It was rather shocking.

"Miss Amberley, you've been living with Miss Ordway at 31 Charlton Street, haven't you?"

"I have."

"Last night you made a statement to me. You don't mind going over some of the same ground again?"

"I don't mind."

"You were on friendly terms with Miss Ordway, weren't you?"

"She was my best friend."

"Did she ever, in the last five weeks, mention Mr. Duluth?"

"She did." Miss Amberley moistened her lips. That was when I noticed that she, like Nanny Ordway, was wearing no lipstick at all. "Many, many times."

"From what she said, what was your impression of the relations between them?"

"It wasn't just my impression. Nanny said it over and over again in the most specific terms."

"Said what, Miss Amberley?"

"That she was in love with him." Miss Amberley's voice quavered slightly. "And he was in love with her."

I looked at that tall, dowdy girl whom I had never seen in my life before, whom I had heard only once for one moment on a phone and, as I looked at her and the implacable chill on her face, I felt the beginnings of horror. "For God's sake . . ." I began.

Lieutenant Trant said, "Please, Mr. Duluth, I'd rather you didn't interrupt."

His gray gaze was fixed on Miss Amberley. "Miss Ordway told you, of course, that Mr. Duluth was a married man?"

"Of course she did. It upset her terribly. Nanny wasn't the sort that enjoyed stealing another woman's husband. To begin with, she struggled against it, but it was too strong, she said. He convinced her he needed her and, because she loved him and he came first, she decided that his wife would have to be the one to suffer."

"And Mr. Duluth had spoken about divorcing his wife?"

"Oh, yes," said Miss Amberley. "Mr. Duluth had promised to get a divorce."

I got up. I said, "Listen to me."

"Please, Mr. Duluth . . ."

"I said—listen to me," I shouted. "I don't know Miss Amberley. I don't know how malicious she is. I don't know how gullible she is. But every word she's said has been a lie. Maybe they're her own lies; maybe they're Nanny Ordway's lies. But they *are* lies."

The girl stood absolutely still, ignoring me. Lieutenant Trant's eyes rested on me for a moment. Then he turned them abruptly back to Miss Amberley.

"I warned her," Miss Amberley's low, cultured, terrible voice was running on. "Time and time again I tried to make her see what she was letting herself in for. He'd never divorce his wife, I told her. We had terrible fights. She was alone in the world. I was her only friend. I knew it was up to me to help her, even to the extent of losing her friendship. But what could I do?"

She swung around to glare at me and spat out, "How can a mere girl compete with a great hulk of male flesh?"

I turned to Trant and said, "This girl's a lunatic. Can't you see that? She's making all this up out of some diseased . . ."

"I asked you not to interrupt, Mr. Duluth," cut in Lieutenant Trant's soft, utterly undisturbed voice. "Miss Amberley, last night we also discussed, didn't we, Miss Ordway's behavior on the night before her death?"

"We did." Miss Amberley's voice was almost a whisper now. "That night she came home late. I'd been away for a week, visiting my family in Boston. I'd gone to bed early right off the train and I was asleep when she got back. But her typewriter woke me. I looked up from the bed and she was sitting at the desk typing. She looked like a ghost, like a girl who'd just been given a death sentence. I got up. I said, 'Nanny, what is it? What's happened?' She didn't answer. She didn't cry or anything. She just sat there, numb. Finally she undressed and went to bed. The next morning she got up before I did. I never saw her again."

"And you attribute this change in Miss Ordway to some quarrel with Mr. Duluth? A sudden decision on his part, for example, not to ask his wife for a divorce, after all?"

"I do."

"And you think this may have been the reason for her death the next day?"

"Of course it was."

I opened my mouth to speak again, but Lieutenant Trant broke in: "Thank you, Miss Amberley. That will be all, right now."

Miss Amberley started for the door.

I called after her. "Hey, you. Wait a minute."

But she passed through the door and closed it behind her.

I spun around to Lieutenant Trant. "Get her back. You let her accuse me of seducing a young girl, making false promises to marry her, driving her to suicide. Let me talk to her. In five seconds, I'd have that story tumbling around her ears."

"You would?" Lieutenant Trant looked up at me, brisk, detached, the impersonal servant of the Law. He touched the buzzer again on his desk.

"She's an obvious neurotic." I was too furious and scared to be coherent. "One of those girls with a grudge against men. Good Lord, you must have come across cases like that. You . . ."

"You're a lightning analyst of character, aren't you, Mr. Duluth? Too bad you weren't as perceptive with Nanny Ordway."

The cop was at the door again. Lieutenant Trant said, "Okay. Bring in Mrs. Coletti, Bill."

"Mrs. Coletti?" I echoed. "*Lucia Coletti*, our maid?"

"You were the one who suggested her as a corroborative witness."

"Of course I was."

Lieutenant Trant was leafing through the typewritten sheets in front of him. "In your statement, you said that Nanny Ordway came every morning to your apartment after you'd left. She came there merely because you had been generous enough to loan her the apartment to write in. That's still your story, I imagine?"

"Why wouldn't it be?"

"She never, for example, spent the night?"

"If she had, I'd have told you."

"Of course, Mr. Duluth. I haven't forgotten your passion for the truth. You are on friendly terms with *Lucia Coletti*?"

"Very friendly."

"She has no reason to bear a grudge against you, to wish you ill?"

"For heaven's sake, no."

"Then you won't accuse her of being neurotic. Fine. At least we've got that settled."

Lucia came in. She was plump and Italian and sixtyish and normally as cheerful as a carnival. But that morning, in her black work coat with her black work hat jammed on her gray hair, she looked thoroughly subdued. She threw me a quick, beseeching glance and then turned, oppressed and respectful, to Lieutenant Trant.

He chose several sheets from the pile of papers, and looked up at her with bright friendliness. "Good morning, Mrs. Coletti. Thank you for coming. I hope it hasn't inconvenienced you."

"My sister—she went in my place to Miss Marin's."

"You live with your sister, Mrs. Bruno, on West Tenth Street and you work as part-time maid for Mr. and Mrs. Duluth. You and your sister were interviewed last night by myself at your home. I just want you to repeat in front of Mr. Duluth what you told me last night."

"I didn't tell you nothing." *Lucia* flung around to me, throwing a hand out. "Honest, Mr. Duluth, I swear it. When you give me that ten bucks not to tell Miss Marin, I promised I wouldn't say



nothing. And I didn't. It was my sister. Gab, gab, gab all the time. She's stupid. She don't know from nothing. It was my sister . . ."

When she mentioned the ten dollars, Lieutenant Trant's eyes flicked up and then down. He'd taken that in and interpreted it all right. Now he interrupted: "Your sister, Mrs. Coletti, only told me what you'd already told her. I'm sorry if this is painful. Perhaps it would be easier if I read her statement out loud."

He looked down at the papers in his hand. "Mr. Duluth claims that Miss Ordway never spent the night in his apartment. He claims that she arrived every morning around ten after he himself had left. He mentioned you as someone who could back up that

assertion." He paused. "I will now read part of your sister's statement."

He started to read in a flat, official voice:

LIEUTENANT TRANT: Mrs. Bruno, when your sister comes back from work in the evenings, does she chat with you about the people she works for?

MRS. BRUNO: Oh, sure, sure. All the time.

LIEUTENANT TRANT: Has she chatted with you about Mr. and Mrs. Duluth?

MRS. BRUNO: Sure. All the time. She's crazy about Mr. and Mrs. Duluth.

LIEUTENANT TRANT: Recently did she tell you that Mrs. Duluth was away in Jamaica?

MRS. BRUNO: With her momma that was sick.

LIEUTENANT TRANT: After Mrs. Duluth was away, did your sister mention a young girl, a friend of Mr. Duluth's, called Ordway? Miss Nanny Ordway?

MRS. BRUNO: The little girl? I should say. That one. That was a shameless one. Lying there in the bed sound asleep in a pair of Mrs. Duluth's pajamas, lying there with Lucia coming right in.

LIEUTENANT TRANT: Do I understand you to say that your sister found Miss Ordway asleep in Mr. Duluth's bed, wearing a pair of his wife's pajamas?

MRS. BRUNO: Sure. Lucia, she was up in the air about it. Never seen nothing like it. And Mr. and Mrs. Duluth always getting on so good with each other.

LIEUTENANT TRANT: And Mr. Duluth was with her?

MRS. BRUNO: Him? Oh, no. Mr. Duluth wouldn't do nothing like that. He has lots of respect for Lucia. He'd gone off then. He'd left Miss Ordway alone.

Lieutenant Trant put the papers down on his desk, studiously ignoring me. "Well, Mrs. Coletti, does that sound correct?"

Lucia had flushed a deep crimson. She stammered: "Yes, I—I guess that's what my sister said."

"And it was true, of course?"

"I guess so. Sure. It's true. I . . ." Lucia turned miserably to me. "Mr. Duluth, honest, I didn't mean to make trouble. Talking with my sister—ain't nothing wrong in that. I didn't . . ."

"All right, Mrs. Coletti." Lieutenant Trant's voice was firm and final. "That'll be all at the moment. Thank you again for dropping by." He got up, took Lucia's elbow and guided her out of the office. He came back. He stood by the door, looking at me with complete absence of triumph on his face. That was his way of rubbing in the fact of his total victory.

CHAPTER 6

I WAS deathly afraid of Nanny Ordway then. She was dead. That unobtrusive, earnest little girl—"a girl and a man can be friends"—had checked out on a red scarf tied to my chandelier. But already that morning, she had arisen twice from the dead and spoken through the lips of Miss Amberley and Lucia Coletti's sister.

She had spoken and she had become terrible as a gorgon's head.

How could the Nanny Ordway whom I had foolishly and pointlessly allowed to slip into my life be the same girl who had been found by Lucia asleep in my bed, who had talked of passion and divorce to Miss Amberley and who had sat like a ghost in front of her typewriter on the night before she died?

She had been mad, of course. And worse than merely mad. She had been maliciously mad. For the world, for me, too, she had hidden behind a plausible façade of sanity, but in secret she had been insanely plotting to destroy me along with herself. What other explanation could there be?

But who was going to believe it? Her martyred innocence had been established. There was nothing to cast doubt upon it—nothing at all except my own hopelessly discredited word.

Wearily, anticipating defeat, I said, "I deny it all."

"That's your privilege, Mr. Duluth."

"I deny it all not because I'm a lunatic who's determined to cling to a shipwrecked lie. I deny it because it's not true. Don't ask me what's wrong with Miss Amberley and with Lucia. And don't ask me what was wrong with Nanny Ordway. What happened happened just the way I told you in my statement."

I, of course, should be demanding a cross-examination of Miss Amberley, swearing my innocence, seething with righteous indignation. But where would it get me? How, for example, could I

explain away the fact that Lucia had seen Nanny Ordway in my bed? Lucia wouldn't lie. She was fond of me.

I said, "Do we have to go on with this conversation? I know what you think of me. I know I'm never going to change your opinion. Just tell me the police setup. Are you going to arrest me? If not, let me sign those statements and get out of here."

His eyes widened slightly. "You still want to sign those statements?"

"Don't you listen to a word I say?"

"Okay, Mr. Duluth." He shrugged. It was the shrug of a man confronted with behavior beyond belief and beneath any further consideration. "You may sign the statements."

I went to the desk. I scrawled my signature at the end of the two documents. "Okay." I got up. "Anything else?"

"Nothing at the moment, Mr. Duluth." Lieutenant Trant picked up the statements, rustling through the papers, checking the signatures. "The full autopsy reports are not in yet. Those things take time, you know. Two or three days."

He looked up from the papers. "But, for your information, Miss Ordway died between two thirty and four—just about the time that you were alone at the movie house. If there should turn out to be a reason for continuing the investigation, that is where I would start—by checking on your alibi."

I hurried through the Detectives' Room and down to the street.

I LET myself into the apartment. Immediately I heard an all-too-familiar voice. It wasn't Iris's voice. It was loud and beautiful and it was booming like surf on a rocky shore.

Iris was sitting on the couch in the living room, smoking a cigarette. Lottie was pacing up and down the center of the rug. When she saw me, she broke off in mid-sentence and spun around to me, all the venom of all the asps in the world in her eyes.

"Well!" she said. "The hunter is home from the hills."

Iris got up. "Lottie, dear, run along and leave us."

"Leave you!" Lottie snorted. "The one who should be left—quickly and finally with full process of law—is Peter Duluth. That is, unless you want a succession of little girls asleep in your bed every morning and hanging from your chandelier every night."

She flounced toward me, warming up for a lynching bee.

"I don't mind, of course, Peter, *dear*, that you cause havoc in

my household by dragging my maid from police station to police station when she should have been dusting. I don't mind that in the least. After all, it was most instructive to meet Lucia's sister. Quite a girl, Mrs. Bruno—with a salty gift for narrative. It cost you ten bucks to keep Lucia from telling me about your cheap little affair, didn't it? You should have invested another ten bucks in her sister."

I couldn't bear the sight of her. Didn't she have a man of her own? Why couldn't she use Brian for her emotional setting-up exercises? "Oh, shut up, Lottie," I said.

"Shut up? Just try to shut me up. Try to shut the world up! What are you going to do? Gag Colonel McCormick? Smother the whole chain of Hearst papers?" She ran to Iris, enveloping her in her arms. "Iris, my darling Iris, I implore you. I plead with you. For your own sake, don't let him talk you around. Don't listen to his ingenious self-justifications. You're not a little mole of a wife who has to put up with things like that. Get rid of him."

"Get out, Lottie," I said.

She released Iris and swept to the door. She turned, tossing Iris a butterfly kiss. "Remember, darling. The moment it's settled, come up to us. Brian agrees with me. He's dying to have you—for as long as you want to stay. *We* are your friends."

She slammed the door. Act One—curtain.

Iris and I looked at each other. It was too horrible not to be a bit funny.

I said, "I've finally done what you wanted me to do. I've mortally offended Lottie."

She didn't smile. I hadn't expected her to. She said, "Is it over at the police station?"

"Yes."

"The suicide's been established and everything?"

"I guess so. The official autopsy report's not in yet."

"Of course Lieutenant Trant knows all this about Lucia and her sister?"

"Of course." I paused. "That isn't the half of it."

I told her about Miss Amberley. I wasn't as panicked as I had been. I suppose Iris was such a basic part of my life that her presence was automatically steadying.

When I finished, she said, "That's all?"

"Yes."

She lit a cigarette. Usually her beauty made me proud and self-assured because she was my wife. Now the beauty and my desire to touch her were blighted by the possibility of losing her.

"Did you really give Lucia ten dollars not to tell Lottie?"

"Yes. I did."

"Why?"

"You know Lottie. If she'd found out I'd given Nanny a key, she'd have plunged into histrionics up to her neckline."

"You didn't write to me about it, either."

"No. I meant to. I guess—well, in the back of my mind, I guess I felt I was being a fool about the whole thing."

Iris wasn't looking at me. "And you don't have any explanation for why Lucia found her asleep in our bed, wearing my pajamas."

"Just that she was mad."

"Even if she'd been mad, she'd have had to have some reason."

I tried: "She was kind of Cinderella-ish about wealth, comfort, things like that. Maybe she had a whim and wanted to find out how it felt to be in a rather grand bed in rather grand pajamas." That sounded the thinnest of all my protestations. "She just could have felt that way. And then, after Lucia had caught her, she could have felt foolish, unable to bring herself to explain. Maybe it was that. I know, when I lent her your evening dress . . ."

Iris looked up then. "When you—what, Peter?"

"Didn't I tell you? When I took her to the theater? It was the last minute. She didn't have time to go home and change. I let her put on one of your dresses."

"I see."

I began to feel jittery and even more of a heel. I said, "Can you believe me? I don't blame you if you can't."

She was studying my face as if, like Lieutenant Trant, she thought she could read the truth there. Very quietly, she said:

"Last night I realized it wasn't any good being in the middle, half believing, half not believing. And then, when Lieutenant Trant was so clever, and veiled and merciless . . . I believed you, Peter. I've started now. I'm not going to stop yet. She was mad. Of course she was mad."

I hurried to her. She put her arms around me and clung to me as if it were she and not I who needed comforting.

"Oh, Peter, I don't want to be a stinker. I don't want to be like Lottie. If I can't trust you, what can I trust?"

"Baby . . ."

"It's all right. I'll be all right in a minute."

I kissed her. I kept her in my arms. She was beautiful and good—far too good for me. I felt humble and grateful. I was stable again.

CHAPTER 7

THE FACT that my wife was standing by me should have brought some sort of release from pressure. But it didn't quite come off. Almost immediately a constraint began to develop between us. Neither of us admitted it, but it was there. We didn't, for example, mention Nanny Ordway again, which in itself was a proof that we were afraid. Iris's belief in me was too fragile, my own sense of blamelessness too insecure.

The press called all the time. So did a lot of people I knew in the theater. Their commiserations didn't help. They thought they were being friendly but they were really being nosy. The afternoon papers came out with Miss Amberley's statement. It wasn't quite as bad as I had expected. Most of her vindictive bitterness had been blue-penciled. But the essential fact was there. NANNY ORDWAY'S ROOMMATE TELLS OF THWARTED LOVE. There were no photographs of Nanny, which made it easier for the copywriters. Now she wasn't only a "brilliant young writer," she was also an "exotic brunette." It was all suggestive enough to satisfy the most respectable of readers.

Alec Ryder called up and invited us to dinner. We accepted because, oddly enough, we didn't know what else to do. He turned out to be just the right person. He was English enough and smooth enough to act as if he'd never heard of Nanny Ordway and, although I knew he was itching to sell Iris on the London trip, he didn't bring it up once. He spent most of dinner talking about his wife's success in a new play that had just opened in the West End. He was a nice guy, too.

But nothing could have saved the evening. By the time we got home it was around eleven o'clock. The apartment, indelibly marked now with the memory of Nanny Ordway, seemed gloomy as a funeral parlor. As we entered it, I glanced at Iris. She had been silent ever since we left Alec. She looked pale and rather

severe. In my oversensitive state, it seemed to me she was being martyrish and I snapped: "There's no need to be noble and forgiving. I'm not the Great Sinner—remember?"

It was an unattractive thing to have said. I knew it. I wished I hadn't said it, but I hadn't been able to stop myself.

She sat down wearily on the couch. "I'm not being forgiving, Peter."

I felt ashamed. I sat down next to her. "I'm sorry, baby. It's just that . . . I feel terrible."

"I don't feel any too radiant myself."

We went to bed. I pretended not to care about the chandelier looming above us, but I did. There was a kind of reconciliation, but long afterward we were both pretending to be asleep when we were really wide awake.

When I woke up next morning, Iris wasn't in the bed. I had a sudden unreasonable fear that it was all over and she had left me. I put on my robe and ran out of the bedroom. She was in the kitchen, fixing breakfast. My relief was as exaggerated as my earlier anxiety.

"Take your shower, darling," she said. "Then we'll be ready."

I went to the bathroom and showered. I tried to think about the day ahead of us. Should I treat it as just an ordinary day? Should I go to the office and Miss Mills and continue with plans for *Let Live* as if nothing had happened?

It depended on Iris, I decided. I would do whatever made it easier for her. I dried myself, put on my robe again and went out into the living room.

Iris was standing by the window. The elevator man must have brought up the mail. She had a bunch of letters in one hand. In the other, she had an opened letter which she was reading. She didn't hear me come in. She was completely absorbed with what she was reading.

I said, "Is breakfast ready?"

She looked up suddenly. I was shocked at the expression on her face. She looked as if a doctor had just told her she was suffering from an incurable disease.

Her mother, I thought. Bad news from her mother.

"Baby, what is it?"

She didn't reply. She looked down again at the letter and then held it out to me.

"What is it?"

She took an opened envelope from her other hand and held it out, too. I accepted them both. The envelope had her name and her Jamaica address typed on it. The Jamaica address had been scratched out and the letter forwarded to her in New York.

The letter was typed. It was very long. It said:

My dear Iris:

It seems all right to call you Iris. I hope you don't mind. Please, please don't mind, because it's so important for me that you shouldn't mind anything connected with me. I know this is going to be hard for you. Heaven knows, it's hard for me. Lots of people, I guess, would say it was wrong of me to write at all. Certainly, that would be the easy thing. But, Iris, I can't do it that way. Always, ever since I was a kid, I've believed that it's honesty that matters. Somehow I have the feeling that you're the same—and that, in the long run, you stand a better chance of being happy with Peter if you know and understand and forgive than if I'd "protected" you and thereby, in a way, made a fool of you.

I glanced up at Iris. She was still standing there holding the other letters. My mouth felt dry and sour. I thought: And I was figuring what to do about today as if something new was beginning. I'd imagined the past had done its worst, that the dreadful voice from the morgue had spoken for the last time.

I went on reading.

Iris, I'm not going to tell you all the details. They are terribly, beautifully important to me, but to you they'd seem banal, tawdry, unattractive, perhaps. It's just the core of it that I want you to know. Peter and I fell in love. Oh, I'm not going to pretend that his was as deep a love as mine. I think maybe he was lonely without you, maybe he was a little flattered that I was younger. I think there were all sorts of other factors with him. But it happened, quickly, magically, just like that. And, for a while, a wonderful while, both of us were able to forget about you. Half able, I should say, because I know that often I used to think of you at the strangest moments, with a kind of awe and a kind of love, a kind of anguished tenderness as if you'd been my very best friend instead of someone I had never even met.

And it's you, Iris dear, who has won in the end. That's why I'm writing this, of course. Because Peter and I are both of us decent people. Whatever we may have thought about ourselves, we've discovered that now. Suddenly, without any warning, it came to us both at the same time. IRIS. Even in that, you see, we had a strange sort of mutuality as if his thoughts and mine were the same. Perhaps that was why it could never really have been right between Peter and me. We were too nearly the same person. Abiding love needs a contrast, doesn't it? That's what I'm telling myself now that I'm so full of unhappiness, anxiety and torment for what I have decided must happen.

Because it was I, Iris, who actually decided we must break. Peter probably felt it, too, but, just because he's Peter, he couldn't have found enough courage to hurt me by bringing it up himself.

So there it is. It's over. I'm never going to see Peter again. I'm not fighting you. I'm not, *not* a rival. He's yours. And I feel, I know, I'm certain that it is you he really belongs to. You must make him believe it. This is the hardest letter I have ever written and I know that Peter will never forgive me for it. But may I end—with my love?

Nanny Ordway

I looked up. The letter was so much worse than anything I could have imagined. It didn't sound mad or vindictive; it sounded like the sincere, heartbreaking confession of a very nice girl.

And, of course, beyond everything, it sounded true.

I said, "It's all a pack of crazy lies."

"Lies." Iris's voice was very soft. "Lies, lies, lies. Miss Amberley's lying. Lucia's lying. Nanny Ordway's lying. Everyone's lying except . . ." She broke off.

I longed to take her in my arms. The physical feeling between us might still have saved the situation. But I knew now, from looking at her white, set face, that she wouldn't let me touch her.

"Iris, baby, listen to me."

"I'm listening."

"She was crazy. We know that now. She's hounding me. She's making me pay."

"For what?"

"If I only knew! Maybe for not falling in love with her."

"But you said she wasn't in love with you."

"I thought she wasn't."

"Thought!" She sat down and brought up her hands to cover her face.

There was a moment of silence, terrible to me as an explosion. Why did I still feel guilty? What was this monstrous power in Nanny Ordway that could always half convince me of my culpability? Did I want to be a victim? Was that why I stood there, watching Nanny's poison do its work on Iris, watching with no power to produce an effective antidote?

I stayed there at her side as if being a little nearer to her physically could somehow help diminish the distance between us.

"I love you, baby. I swear I love you."

"No, Peter. Please, please, no . . ."

"But, Iris . . ."

"I tried," she said. "I certainly tried."

There was no mistaking the finality in her voice. It was someone speaking about the past. I felt cold and hollow.

I said, "You're not going to try any longer?"

She took her hands from her face and looked at me. It wasn't a look of hatred or anger. It was worse. It was a look of despair.

"I can't stay here, Peter."

What was the use of arguing? When you're knocked out, you're knocked out. You don't get up again after the count and start to fight again. "Okay," I said.

"I don't accuse you of anything. I—I don't feel hateful. It's just that I can't stay."

I no longer seemed to have any personal emotions. All I felt was pity and tenderness for her.

She went into the bedroom and started packing a suitcase. I followed. "Where are you going?" I said.

"To some hotel—some little hotel. I'll not use my name. No one need know. It needn't make any fuss in the papers."

"I'll go with you in the taxi."

There was a framed photograph of me on a table by the window. She went to it, picked it up and put it on top of her clothes. Then she shut the suitcase.

We stood looking at each other. Above us was the chandelier.

"If I wasn't so mixed up, Peter . . ."

"I know."

"You'll be all right?"

"Sure."

"I—know I'll be back soon."

"I know."

I picked up the suitcase. We went down to the street. It was a bright morning with the air clean as country air. A taxi took us to a small uptown hotel.

I left Iris at the entrance and took the same taxi home. In the cab I started to feel again. The anesthesia was wearing off. Iris said she'd be back soon. Why would she be back soon? How was she ever going to make herself believe that black was white?

Nanny Ordway had lost me my wife.

CHAPTER 8

WHEN I let myself into the apartment, an image of Nanny Ordway rose in my mind—Nanny as described by Miss Amberley on the night before her death, sitting like a statue in front of her typewriter, tap, tap, tapping. Hadn't she said to me that night when she left the apartment that she still had work to do? Had that work been the letter to Iris which had irrevocably proved me a heel and a liar?

What could have been in her mind? Iris was right when she said that even a crazy person had to have motives. Could Nanny Ordway, in her self-created fantasy world, really have kidded herself I was in love with her? Had she managed to make herself believe all the stories she had told Miss Amberley? Had the letter to Iris, then, been written, not in spite, but in a mad decision to bring an imaginary romance to a heroic end in renunciation and suicide?

The secret of death . . . ! I would have to solve it. My life would never be livable until I had understood what had wrecked it. Nor would there be any hope of true reconciliation with Iris.

The only thing to do was to turn and fight. Knowledge is power. Francis Bacon had said that. The only way to defeat Nanny Ordway was to obtain more knowledge of her.

If, for example, I could find someone who had known her, who could prove that she had been mad, then I could take that person to Iris and even to Lieutenant Trant. But where could I start my search? Incredible as it now sounded, I knew virtually nothing

1985

about Nanny Ordway. Once she had mentioned a mother, but the publicized fact of her death had, apparently, caused no relative or friend to come forward. It was as if she had deliberately fostered her anonymity.

There was only one person who could help me. Miss Amberley.

There was no use phoning and finding out whether she was in. If she knew I was coming, she'd barricade the door. I'd have to go down there and somehow force myself on her.

The phone rang. I rushed to answer it. I suppose I thought it would be Iris. It was Miss Mills. "Peter, Iris just called me."

"She did?"

"She told me about the letter and all. She's very unhappy."

"I know."

"I tried to argue with her but there wasn't anything I could do. Peter, you can't blame her."

"Of course not."

"And there's one thing more I think you should know. That policeman, Lieutenant Trant, was around this afternoon. He asked a lot of questions—exactly when you came in from that movie, whether I could find any more of the drawings Nanny made, things like that. I was a little worried. I thought the case was closed so far as homicide was concerned."

"That's what I thought."

"Well, it isn't."

That was a comforting piece of news!

"He's a charmer, that one. He turned on the full male heat—special brand reserved for older girls. He could tell how smart I was, how I would be the first to realize that it was best for everyone's sake to have the truth established. He was smooth, too—didn't give away a darn thing. Peter, do you want me to try to find out what he's up to?"

"Think you can?"

"Oh, sure, he thinks I'm mad for him. He told me if ever I thought of anything, any little thing, I was to run around to his office at the station house. Then shall I try it tomorrow?"

"Fine."

She hung up. I went out and took a taxi to 31 Charlton Street.

THE ENTRANCE to Number 31 was below street level. I went down the stone steps and pressed the buzzer marked Claire

Amberley. An answering buzz sounded in the closed front door. I pushed it inward and walked up the chocolate-painted staircase to the second floor. As I turned from the stairhead into the landing, Miss Amberley was hovering outside her half-open door, wearing an old, paint-stained smock.

I hadn't expected to come upon her so suddenly. She obviously had not expected me, either. A flush spread over her face.

"You!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

I said, "I want to talk to you."

"Well, you can't. Not possibly."

She took a step backward, fluttery and frightened. "My brother's here. He's just arrived from Woods Hole. He . . ."

Her banal protests petered out as the door was pulled open from inside and a young man came out. "What is it, Claire?"

Miss Amberley swung around. "John, it's—Mr. Duluth." She spoke my name as if it were Jack the Ripper.

The young man was tall and thin with a small head on a long neck. He had a short crew haircut and a stiff, university manner. His nondescript face was just saved from being homely by a pair of very steady, intelligent blue eyes. He looked tired or sick.

He said, "I'm John Amberley, Claire's brother. What do you want, Mr. Duluth?"

"I want to talk about Nanny Ordway," I said.

"No," said Miss Amberley. "No."

For a moment her brother hesitated. Then he said, "Come in, Mr. Duluth."

"John!" cried Miss Amberley.

"Please, Claire. I want to talk to him. It can't make things any worse than they are."

She didn't object any more, and let him guide her inside the apartment. I followed.

The room with the blue walls was even more cluttered than I had remembered. The easel had been dragged into the middle of the floor. I had expected to feel Nanny Ordway here, but the high-brow disarray struck no responsive chord. It all fitted exactly with Miss Amberley.

Claire Amberley moved to the easel and stood beside it, rejecting me with every ounce of her being. Her brother said, "Sit down, Mr. Duluth."

He pushed some books aside on one of the studio couches and

sat down himself, arranging his long, bony legs. I sat on the other couch. He couldn't have been much more than thirty, but, as with his sister, there was an elderly air to him. I thought he was probably a master at one of the more elegant boys' prep schools.

"Just what do you want to know about Nanny Ordway, Mr. Duluth?"

"As much as I can."

"Why?"

"Because she was found dead in my apartment. Because, according to your sister, I had promised to marry her when, in fact, I hardly knew her. Because she's managed to make a superlative mess of my life. Isn't that reason enough to be curious?"

"A mess of *his* life!" cried Miss Amberley. "Did you hear that, John? What did I tell you?"

John Amberley put his hands on his knees. He was watching me with an odd intentness as if every detail of my appearance had some private importance for him.

"This isn't an easy situation, Mr. Duluth."

"Did anyone say it was?"

"No. But it's a little more complicated than you may realize." He paused. "You see, I was in love with Nanny Ordway. I had asked her to be my wife."

He made that unexpected announcement quietly, almost diffidently. It took me completely by surprise, and I felt a kind of weary despair. I had come here in the hopes of proving Nanny Ordway had been insane. All I found was a man who had asked her to marry him!

Suddenly I felt Nanny Ordway's immediate physical presence. I thought of her as a spider, a gray, unobtrusive little spider spinning delicate, devious webs, crouching in dark corners, crouching only to spring down the threads at her victims. Me . . . John Amberley . . . Who else?

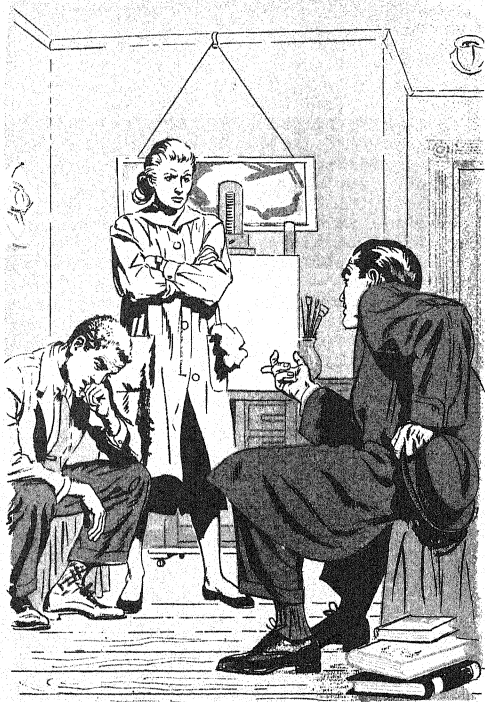
"When did all this happen?" I asked.

"I asked Nanny to marry me a few weeks ago. On my birthday, as a matter of fact."

"And she accepted?" I wouldn't have been surprised if she had. Nothing about Nanny Ordway could surprise me any more.

"She neither accepted nor refused, Mr. Duluth. She asked me to wait a while."

"Why?"



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"Because of you, of course," put in Miss Amberley. "She was still hoping you'd divorce your wife, that you wouldn't let her down. That's when I made her confide in me, the day she'd told John to wait. I knew there was another man. I'd suspected it for some time. I urged, I begged, I pleaded for John's sake. Finally she told me about you. She admitted she was in love with the husband of a famous actress. Oh, she was loyal to you, of course. Nanny was always loyal. But it all came out when you telephoned—the whole, charming, sweet-smelling story that I told to Lieutenant Trant." It would have been less horrible if she had not been enjoying herself so much. She was just like Lottie.

"Did you tell Lieutenant Trant about your brother's involvement in this?"

"I certainly did not. Hadn't you done enough damage already? Did my brother's name have to get splashed all over the headlines? He's a responsible man with a responsible job. Does he have to be martyred, too?"

All those rhetorical questions! John Amberley was still sitting there quietly on the couch. He was obviously suffering. I understood that tired, sick look now—it was the look of a man who had tragically lost his girl. I said to him, "I'm sorry for you. Can you at least believe that?"

"Oh, yes. You probably are. I am sorry for myself." Surprisingly the ghost of a smile haunted his lips. "I'm learning quite a lot of things about myself, Mr. Duluth. I'm a meteorologist by profession. It's my job to sift a mass of frequently conflicting data, to correlate it, and to reach some satisfactory conclusion. In the laboratory, even the most complex problems sooner or later succumb to the scientific method. But I've discovered that I can't import that scientific method into my private life. It should be possible for me to admit that there was some mistake with Nanny, that you are not what I think you are. But I can't keep an open mind. I can't. I can only sit here and look at you and think . . ."

He brought a clenched fist up to his mouth. It was a little child's gesture. I'd seen babies do it to try to keep themselves from crying. It was a shocking, naked moment.

I got up. "You shouldn't have let me in."

"No. I'm sorry. Please. Don't go." Anger at himself or shame had given him control again. "If I feel a shabby emotion, I don't have to give way to it. You have your problems, too. You came

here to ask questions. If it can help you . . . if anyone can be helped, it's better than this. Go ahead. Ask whatever you like."

He was a very strange young man. I sat down again.

"All right," I said. "Can you tell me the name of anyone else who knew her—anyone who might still have an open mind about her?"

"I'm afraid I can't help you there. Nanny came into our lives by chance. We knew nothing of her friends."

"What about her parents?"

"They are both dead. They came from Virginia. Quite a good old family, apparently, but they were poor. They were both killed in an automobile accident when she was sixteen. Since then she had been on her own."

"How long have you known her, Mr. Amberley?"

"About six months."

"Where did you meet her?"

"Here in the Village. At a night club—Sylvia's. On West Tenth Street. She was working there as a waitress."

"A waitress?"

"They have girls waiting on table," he said. "It's all very informal. One of those carefree, bohemian places. I was down from Woods Hole for the week-end. Claire took me there. She thought it might amuse me. Nanny happened to be the waitress who served us. She—she was obviously different from the other girls, more intelligent, more sensitive. I had Henry James's *The Ambassadors* with me. She made some remark about it. I didn't expect a waitress in a night club to know about Henry James. But he was her favorite author. After she'd brought our beer, she sat down at the table with us. That's allowed at the club. We got to talking. And both Claire and I . . . Didn't we, Claire?"

He broke off. I realized then just how much of an effort it was for him to talk this way and marveled at the self-discipline that impelled him, against every inclination, to help a man who—as far as he knew—had caused his girl's suicide.

But my interest in him was overshadowed by my absorption in Nanny Ordway. For the first time, I was seeing her doing things that had not been connected with me, leading the life which, in the end, had caused such havoc for all of us. I could see her vividly in that arty Village night club, aggressively unobtrusive, quiet-spoken, with her hair flopping over her face, young, naive,

getting the subtle effect. *Henry James. Oh, excuse me for mentioning it, but I'm mad about Henry James.*

John Amberley spoke again. "Mr. Duluth, does this give any picture? Does this help?"

I said, "I'd be very grateful if you'd go on."

"Well, she sat there with us, off and on, when she wasn't serving, all evening. We talked about lots of things. She was so quick, so alive. Both Claire and I were impressed. We went back the next evening, didn't we, Claire? And that time she told us something of herself. She was living in some furnished room with another girl."

"What girl?"

"Oh, I don't know that. She didn't say. But it was all very inconvenient for her and—well, before the evening was out, Claire suggested she should move in here with her. Nanny was terribly diffident. She always hated accepting favors. But between us, we managed to persuade her."

The way I had managed to persuade her to take my key! I could see Nanny Ordway again in Claire Amberley's blue satin evening dress turning quickly from the window seat while I held the key out to her. *Oh, no, no, I could never . . .* Nanny Ordway who hated accepting favors but who always seemed to have ended up accepting them. A furnished room with an unknown girl—Miss Amberley and the Village—me and Sutton Place. Always a step up.

John Amberley's voice was running on. "I had to go back to Woods Hole after the week-end, of course, but Nanny moved in with Claire the next day. Both Claire and I had decided that there was no point in her going on working in that place. And she'd told us how it was her dream to be a writer. . . . Well, Claire was perfectly prepared to let her live in the apartment with her as long as she liked, to give her a chance with her writing. She was company for Claire and . . ."

"And she was mad, of course," put in Miss Amberley's voice, gravid with sarcasm. "Naturally when I picked a girl to live with me, to be my friend, I would choose a raving maniac."

John Amberley was saying, "I came down again the next week-end. The three of us went about together. Claire had got very fond of her then. And I—well, I've never been particularly a ladies' man, Mr. Duluth. I've always been absorbed with my

work and . . . and, well, a bit shy, maybe. But with Nanny it was different. She wasn't one of those girls who make you feel small. She seemed to be fond of me, at least as Claire's brother, and she was interested in our family. We've been in Boston a good many generations, you know. I should have guessed she would have far—far more stimulating, glamorous men interested in her. But I didn't realize. I—I thought I had a chance. I asked her to marry me. And—well, that's all, really."

His naive frankness and his humility were embarrassing now. I understood him even less than I had. I held out my hand. "Thanks. You've been very kind."

He looked at my hand a moment and then took it. "I'm sorry, Mr. Duluth. I should have been able to control myself a great deal better."

Suddenly Miss Amberley laughed. "Listen to them. Isn't it wonderful? The two noble males kissing and making up!"

The green protuberant eyes fixed me then with a look of undiluted malevolence. "What does it feel like to be such a charmer? To meet you is to love you, isn't it? Everyone falls at your feet."

"Yes," I said savagely, "the nation's sweetheart. That's me."

"But it's too bad, isn't it, that people see through you in the end? Your wife, for example."

"What about my wife?"

"Oh, nothing." She shrugged. "Just that she was here this afternoon. She's charming, perfectly charming. Poor dear, it was really pathetic. She so much wanted to believe your extraordinary theory that Nanny was mad. She even had some gullible idea that I would back you up. But once I'd told her about John, about what a wonderful person Nanny really was, she realized, of course, just how gullible she had been. She left here, I assure you, fully informed and with no illusions."

CHAPTER 9

I WALKED out onto Charlton Street. A mist had come up from the river. It impregnated the air with dampness and blurred the street lights. Claire Amberley's final announcement had hurt me just as much as it had been intended to hurt. I might have guessed Iris would visit her. In her confusion and unhappiness,

who else was there to whom she could turn for enlightenment? Like me, she had hoped that Miss Amberley might somehow hold out a life line. Well, she knew better now.

There was still Sylvia's on West Tenth Street—the only doorway left open that might lead me to the real Nanny Ordway. I found a taxi and the driver found the place, grumbling at the mist, grumbling at the lot of all taxi drivers, but surprisingly picking out Sylvia's from a warren of other obscure little night clubs.

The place was in darkness. I told the driver to wait and went to try the door. It was locked. I stood a moment glowering at the darkened door, feeling that even glass and metal and wood had turned against me.

But there was nothing I could do. I knew the end of a day when I saw one. I got back into the taxi and gave my home address. Nanny Ordway climbed into the taxi with me. She was still there when I got out at Sutton Place.

I was awakened next morning by the front-door buzzer. My first thought, bringing a cold flutter in my stomach was: Lieutenant Trant. I went to the door in my pajamas. Brian was standing there. He looked unhappy. "Hi, Peter, can I come in?"

"Sure."

He walked into the living room. "I can't stay. Lottie doesn't know I'm here. I told her I was going around the block for cigarettes. Peter, Lottie's terribly mad."

"I wouldn't doubt it."

"She's really on the rampage. Peter, I hate to butt in, but you'd better come up and try to calm her down."

The mere thought of Lottie made me tired. "I'm sorry, Brian. I can't face her right now."

"You'd better. She's going to break the contract."

"She can't break her contract."

"There's a sickness clause."

"But she's not sick."

"Lottie can be anything she wants to be. You know that. She's worked herself up into the tizzy of all time. She's babbling about her heart, her nerves. She's going to call Dr. Norris. She's going to make him write a certificate saying she has to have two weeks off. I can't do anything with her. Maybe you can't either, any more. But, for your own sake, you'd better try."

So here it was. Nanny Ordway was still on the job. Without

Lottie, *Star Rising* would automatically shut down. Without Lottie, I'd have the whole production on full pay on my hands without a penny coming in. Probably, too, I would have the play die under me if Lottie chose to go on being "nervous" indefinitely.

At any other time, this would have been a major tragedy to be averted at all costs. But I, who had lost so much, still had my pride, and now my pride was more important than my pocket-book. Lottie Marin had accused me of every sin in the calendar and tried to break up my marriage. I was damned if I was going to go crawling up there begging her to forgive me.

Brian was watching me hopefully.

I said, "Thanks for letting me know. But I couldn't be less impressed."

"Then you won't try?"

"I won't."

He stood a moment in silence. "Okay. I don't blame you." He paused. "Where is Iris?"

"I don't want Lottie to know. She's done enough damage already."

"I wish you'd tell me. I wouldn't tell Lottie."

"Why do you want to know?"

He flushed. "I just thought—maybe I'd go talk to her. Do you think I feel good about Lottie barging in and everything? Peter, let me try. I'd feel a lot better. And I won't tell Lottie—honest."

"Okay," I said. I gave him the address of Iris's hotel.

He grinned. "Fine. I'll try to make her see sense." He started for the door and then turned. "Sure you won't come up and try?"

"Quite sure."

"Okay. You know best. 'By, now."

After Miss Amberley, I hadn't any hopes of Brian as an ambassador to Iris, but his kindness in offering himself made me feel a little better about Lottie's betrayal. I went into the kitchen and made some coffee. I was drinking it when the phone rang. It was Miss Mills. "Morning, Peter. How are you?"

"Alive. Anything more from Trant?"

"Not yet. Do you still want me to go around to the station house and try him out?"

"Yes."

"Fine. Listen, I said I'd hold the office down without you. But I can't. Thomas Wood's here."

Thomas Wood was the author of *Let Live*.

"He's just flown in bright as a bird from Ann Arbor, flapping his wings, full of fun and scholarly wit. He thought he'd surprise us, he said."

"That's nice."

"Peter, he's bursting with plans for the play and raring to meet a real live producer. I'm not important enough. He has me tabbed as an old mop you keep around to wipe the floor with. I'm sorry, but you've just got to come and cope."

"All right," I said. "Have you heard about Lottie?"

"What about the darling thing?"

"She's going to be sick. She's getting Dr. Norris to write out a certificate for a two weeks' release from the play. Nervous exhaustion."

"Peter, you can't let her do that. Go right upstairs and whimper like a cocker spaniel."

"I'd rather choke to death."

She paused and then said resignedly, "Okay, if that's the way the land lies. Shall I notify the cast?"

"Better wait till we hear officially."

"Well, well," said Miss Mills, "what a lovely week we're having. Listen, you've simply got to come and charm Mr. Wood now, and the moment you show up I'll go around to Trant."

I went to the office. Miss Mills had already called Trant with some cock-and-bull story about wanting his advice. He'd said to come right around. She kissed me.

"Peter, I don't look too much like a spy, do I?"

"No."

"Well, I'll do my best. You do your best with Mr. Wood. He's in your office."

Dramatists who have just had their first play accepted fall into one of two categories. Either they are little mice who don't dare say boo to an assistant stage manager or else they're George Bernard Shaw. Thomas Wood was George Bernard Shaw. He wanted tickets for all the hit shows. He wanted interviews. Even though the play had hardly got off my desk, he was full of inspirations for direction, casting and sets. To make it worse, in his professorial Michigan retreat he didn't seem to read the lurid newspapers. His greatest inspiration was that the chief female part in *Let Live* was a natural for Iris. As a matter of fact, it would

have suited her, but I spent an uncomfortable period giving him every reason but the right one as to why I didn't think she would consider it. I suppose I could have told him the truth—that my wife had left me because a girl had been found hanging from my bedroom chandelier.

It was over an hour before I finally got rid of him, and even then I had to promise to get him matinee tickets and to take him to dinner and another show myself that evening. He expected it and I couldn't afford to antagonize him.

Just after he left the office, Lottie's agent called and announced Lottie's "nervous collapse." I fumed and fretted, but I knew there was nothing I could do. Dr. Norris had given his certificate.

I went around to the theater to get the announcement of a two-week shutdown posted. While I was talking to the stage manager, Gordon Ling came out of his dressing room. Gordon was one of those smalltime actors who always hang around the theater when they're working, probably because they're bored with their dreary little furnished rooms and the theater makes them feel they're big shots.

His handsomely aging face broke into an awkward smile. "You're having a rough time, Peter."

"We take the rough with the smooth."

"Peter, I wish there was something I could do." I was surprised, looking at him, to realize that he meant it. I'd never thought Gordon Ling had any feeling for me. When you're down, you find sympathy in the most unexpected places. "How about lunch on me? Think that would do any good?"

"Well . . ." I began.

Then Iris's voice broke in behind me. "Sorry, Gordon, but Peter's having lunch with me."

I turned. My wife was standing just inside the stage door in front of the Bulletin Board. She was smiling. But it wasn't a real smile; it was something she was putting on for Gordon, the stage-door man and whoever else happened to be around.

She took my arm. We went out together into the alley that led to the street. Her arrival had taken me completely by surprise. I felt very shy and tense.

She said awkwardly, "This is Brian's idea."

So that was it.

"He came around. He was very sweet. He said why not have

lunch with Peter, at least? It'll look better for the columnists if nothing else. Go somewhere where you'll be seen, like Sardi's. Shall we go to Sardi's?"

"Okay," I said. My voice was just as awkward as hers.

I knew that it was going to be a disastrous lunch, because Iris was trying to hate me. Nanny's letter had poisoned her; Miss Amberley had poisoned her. She'd had plenty of time to think, and there was only one conclusion she could have reached—that I was a complete heel. That was why she was fighting against me and against her love for me.

When we were seated, I said: "I hear you were at Miss Amberley's yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"She made it worse, didn't she?"

Iris carefully did not look at me. "She told me about her brother."

"Whose beautiful romance I blighted."

She flared suddenly: "Is that so funny? That a man was in love with her and wanted to marry her? That you . . ."

"I—what?"

She did look at me then. "Peter, if only you'd told me the truth from the beginning. . . . If only you'd trusted me, instead of lying, evading . . ."

I felt a kind of savage mirth. If I'd trusted her! If I'd admitted that I'd been a fool, a seducer and a knave—she would have forgiven me! Everything would have been dandy! The injustice of it all was too much for me and I said bitterly, "You and Lottie. There's not a cent's worth of difference between you."

"What a thing to say!"

"It's true. It . . ." The futility of my anger occurred to me. "Iris, baby, I'm sorry. I've missed you so much."

"No, Peter. No."

We dragged it out somehow until coffee. Then Alec Ryder came over from another table. It was almost a relief to see him. As usual, he treated us exactly as if we were just another married couple of whom he was fond.

"I seem to be giving a party tonight. I do hope you'll come."

I said, "I'm sorry. I've got a playwright on my hands."

He turned to Iris, smooth as his Bronzini silk tie. "How about you, Iris? You can make it, can't you?"

Iris glanced at me quickly, then she looked back at Alec. "Yes," she said, "I think I can. Yes, Alec, I'd love it."

"Fine. Around six thirty." He went back to his table.

A faint flush was spreading over my wife's cheeks. I could read her thoughts as clearly as if they were scrawled across the menu. She was going to take up Alec's offer to do the play in England.

"Iris . . ." I began.

Her bright smile chilled off my words. "It's getting rather late. I really think I should be leaving."

Late for what? Leaving to go where? I thought in total defeat: Is this the last time I'm ever going to see her?

"All right," I said. "I'll get the check."

CHAPTER 10

HE GOT up quickly and left the table before the waiter came. A lot of people watched her taut, hurried flight toward the door. She'd left because the tension between us had become unendurable. Brian's well-intended scheme had boomeranged. All afternoon theatrical telephones would be jangling.

"My dear, have you heard the latest Nanny Ordway thing? Peter and Iris were at Sardi's for lunch and . . ."

Alec Ryder and his party, passing the table on their way out, gave me careful smiles. The waiter came with the check.

I said, "Get me a double brandy."

He brought it. I gulped most of it and ordered a second. I knew I was giving up. The moment of ultimate blackness which I had, half resignedly, been awaiting from the beginning had finally arrived. Now it had come, it brought with it an almost voluptuous sense of relief. I'd fought. I'd done my best. I'd lost. Okay. Let Nanny Ordway have her full triumph—with half of Sardi's looking on.

I had almost finished the second drink and was sitting with the glass tilted in my hand when a strange sensation began to stir in me. It had happened before. All this had happened before. In some nightmare, in some . . .

It came to me then. Of course! Twelve years ago—the night after my first wife died! I had been sitting just here—at this same table. *A double brandy.* I could hear my own voice from the past

as I gave the order. That had been the beginning. *A double brandy*—and this sensation of relief, this perverse pleasure in yielding. Let it all go. Who cares?

Suddenly I was plunged back into the sordid months of collapse that had followed, months stale with self-pity and the smell of alcohol, spiraling downward to their nadir in the discreet, expensive sanitarium. Had I learned nothing from all that? Did I have to go through it all a second time?

I put the drink down. I called the waiter and paid the check.

I was out on the street before I realized I had won my greatest victory. Miraculously, I had sloughed off all the deadening weight of anxiety. I was no longer Peter Duluth in his tight little sheath of despair, suffering as no man had ever suffered before. I was just a guy in a jam—a guy who had better do something about it quickly.

Wasn't there a breed of spider which paralyzed its victims with a poisoned bite and kept them alive but passive for the eventual meal? That was the Nanny-spider. But Nanny's numbing venom had not been quite powerful enough. I was tougher than she had thought. I felt an improbable exhilaration which brought an extraordinary clarity of mind.

Lieutenant Trant thought Nanny Ordway had been murdered. Okay. Why wasn't that a solution just as likely as a solution of suicide? And why wasn't it, instead of being another stone around my neck, a life line to pull me to safety? For, if she had been murdered, I hadn't murdered her. Someone else had. Someone who must have hung her to my chandelier and left her there to victimize me.

If that was the way it had happened, Nanny Ordway was not the only enemy. There was another enemy who was not a ghost, who was alive and who could still be grappled with.

Taxis were streaming up Broadway. I flagged one and had it drive me home.

The telephone was ringing when I entered the apartment. I went to answer it. Miss Mills's voice said: "Peter, where on earth have you been? I've been calling for half an hour."

"Did you see Trant?"

"Yes, I saw him and . . ." She broke off.

"And—what?"

"It's bad, Peter. It couldn't be worse. I'm coming right over."

She arrived in about ten minutes. She came running into the living room. I'd never seen her distracted before. It touched me. Miss Mills and anxiety didn't go together.

I said, "Trant thinks it's murder and he thinks I murdered her?"

She gazed at me, startled. She had thought I'd be a nervous wreck.

I put my hands on her arms. "Is that it, Miss Mills?"

"Yes, Peter. I guess it is."

"He told you?"

"Oh, no. He's much too discreet for that."

She sat down on the arm of a chair and started fumbling ineffectually in her purse. I brought out cigarettes and lit one for her.

She said, "I went into his office in a fluttery spinster routine. I was worried, I said. So terribly worried with you unhappy and Lottie sick. Couldn't something be done? Right away I saw some papers on his desk. I thought they might be something. I pretended to work myself into a vapor. I asked for a glass of water. He went out into the squad room to get it for me. I ran around the desk to look at the papers and . . ."

"And?"

"It was a report from a handwriting expert. About the drawings. Peter, the suicide note was a fake. The 'secret of love'—all that—had just been torn off the title page of her story, the report said. And the drawing of the hanging girl—it hadn't been made by Nanny Ordway. The expert had checked it with the first drawing she'd done and he was sure. Someone else had made it. And—and at the end of the report, he'd written: 'So I guess you're right, Trant. It's murder.'"

Miss Mills was looking at me miserably, still only half believing I could take it. "I was back in my chair before he came in with the water. And then, while I was drinking it, the phone rang. It was a Dr. Schwartz from the morgue, and I could tell Trant was excited. He kept on saying, yes, yes, good. And then, at the end, he said: 'So I'll call you at four thirty for the final word.' It must have been something about the autopsy, Peter. Trant had put them onto something. They thought they'd proved it. But he'd have to wait for the final results."

She leaned forward on the chair arm. "Peter, darling, I left then. I rushed to the nearest telephone. I hate to tell you this,

but it's you he's going to suspect. Of course it is. And once he's got the dope from the morgue . . ."

He'll arrest you. That was what she had been meaning to say, but at that moment her words choked off in a sob. I put my arms around her, dimly astonished at the shift in mood which had me comforting the indomitable Miss Mills.

"Don't worry," I said. "I didn't kill her."

"Of course you didn't!" She looked up at me, her face passionately convinced. "But . . ."

"It's all right. I promise you."

I glanced at my watch. It was a quarter of four. The chips were down now. Trant had proved the drawing was a fake. At four thirty he would get the dope—whatever it was—from the morgue. After that, what was to prevent him from coming around to arrest me?

An hour or two hours, maybe. That was all. My shiny new calm was wonderful. I was in love with it. Francis Bacon was back at my elbow, whispering: "*Knowledge is power.*" There was one way, at least, to gain some knowledge—a way I couldn't try with Miss Mills there.

I managed to get rid of her. She didn't want to go. She clung to me, begging me to let her stand by me, all the mother in her resenting the fact that I had suddenly grown up. To make her feel useful, I suggested that she go back to the office, call Thomas Wood, and tell him I wouldn't be able to take him to the theater that evening.

"There's still the play, Miss Mills. You don't want me to go penniless to jail." That, and a promise to call her whenever I needed her, did the trick.

It was four o'clock when she left. Immediately afterward, I called the morgue and asked for Dr. Schwartz. I felt absolutely sure of myself and of my own faked voice when I said:

"Schwartz? Trant. Any news?"

"Oh, Trant, I was just going to call you. You're clear on the neck marks. Even Dr. Dunton agrees now. Once he heard you'd proved the suicide note was a fake, he came around to murder. It still could just have been suicide, but it's much more likely she was garroted first and then strung up. Don't worry about any defense tricks. We can make a case that'll hold up in any court of law in the country."

"Fine." I took a gamble. "And the other thing?"

Dr. Schwartz said, "You hit it right on the nose. Final report's just come down. She was between five and six weeks pregnant. So far as we're concerned, it's all sewed up, Trant. Go grab your theatrical producer whenever you want to. And good hunting."

I put down the receiver. Here at last was the final piece of evidence. Peter Duluth, the seducer, who had killed his pregnant light-of-love before she could wreck his marriage!

Of course, that was what Trant would think. It was what the world would think. But for me, back being Peter Duluth again, this was the final defeat of Nanny Ordway. Gone forever was the innocent, pixy Gloria O'Dream. *A man and a girl can be friends.* All the tormenting bafflements of the case had dissolved and the true Nanny Ordway was starting to emerge from the mists.

She had been five or six weeks pregnant. She had suspected, then, what the situation might be almost from the beginning of our relationship. So much for her broken confession to Miss Amberley; so much for her terrible, quiet sleep in my bed; so much for her noble, soap-opera letter to Iris.

Sure, I had been her victim, but not just the victim of a mad girl with a mad infatuation. I had been a far more humiliating kind of victim than that.

She had decided she was pregnant and she had picked me for the father. Peter Duluth, the ideal sucker to be on the other end of a paternity suit supported by the evidence of her girl friend, of my maid, and even the evidence of my own wife!

Here at last was a plausible Nanny Ordway. Why had I never thought of her before? Had it been my vanity? Had I secretly preferred the picture of a moon-struck maiden dying for love of me to a portrait of myself as a middle-aged fool on the wrong side of a shakedown?

In the fatuous excitement of having at last discovered the truth, I thought: So it's all over. Trant doesn't have to come for me. I'll go to Trant. I'll explain it all to him. I can explain it all to Iris, to Lottie. . . .

That was where the bubble burst. Just because I had realized at last that I'd been the victim of a plot, that did not automatically save me from being the victim. Of course I could go to Trant, to Iris, to all of them, and swear that I wasn't the father of her child. But why should they believe me? Wasn't I ever going to learn

that the truth isn't enough—that the truth needs as much evidence to support it as a lie?

Why wasn't I the father? How could I prove it—unless I found the father?

Sylvia's. Sylvia's on West Tenth Street. It was the flimsiest of clues to Nanny Ordway's past, but it was the only one I had. It was better to try Sylvia's again than to sit here and wait for Lieutenant Trant.

I put on my coat. I was a fugitive from justice. At least, I would be one from the moment Trant called the morgue. But my exhilaration was still with me.

It was because Nanny Ordway had gone. The suggestion of her grave little-girl profile was no longer there at the corner of my eye. I was free of my obsession.

CHAPTER 11

IT WAS five o'clock when I reached Sylvia's and it was still closed. A cop was chatting with a news vendor on the corner. I went up to him and said: "When does Sylvia's open?"

"Sylvia's?" He glanced at me amiably, without interest. "It shut down. Couple of weeks ago. Sylvia went off to California. Got a new place there."

I exploited my disappointment. "What am I going to do? I'm from out of town. Left a coat there about a month ago."

"You'd better go around to the station house. Lost and Found. Maybe they sent it over there."

"No, I don't think so. You see, I left it on purpose. With the hat-check girl." Hat-check girls know everything there is to know about the place they work in. "She was a pal of mine. I suppose you don't know . . ."

"Anne?" cut in the news vendor. "Good-looking girl? Colored?"

"That's it," I said.

"Well, that's a cinch. Anne's working just around the corner, now. Short-order lunch counter. Can't miss it. You're in luck, mister."

"Yes," I said, sincerely returning his grin. "I'm in luck. Thank you."



I hurried around the block. The light was fading. There was only one short-order lunch counter, Joe's Quick Lunch. I went in. Three girls in white uniforms were working behind a long tiled counter. Only one was colored. She was at the end of the counter near the door.

The news vendor had been right. She was astonishingly beautiful. It was a face suggesting jungle leaves, waterfalls in forest pools, exotic flowers drooping from vines, a face Gauguin would have painted if he had gone to the Congo instead of Tahiti. Her eyes, green behind thick lashes, watched me with a weary passivity.

"Yes, sir?" she asked.

I said, "Your name's Anne, isn't it? You worked at Sylvia's?"

"That's right."

"Did you know Nanny Ordway?"

There was no change in the dazed, dreamy eyes. "Are you a cop?"

"No."

Her gaze, studying my face, kindled to faint interest.

"You're Peter Duluth. I saw your picture in the paper."

"You did know Nanny?"

"Sure, I knew her."

"Then will you help me—please?"

Her dark-red lips parted, showing a glimpse of white teeth.

"I guess you're in a jam, Mr. Duluth."

"That's right."

"I'll talk to you." She glanced around. "But not here. The old man's death on talking with customers. I'm through at eight."

"No," I said. "It's got to be now."

I took out my wallet. She glanced across the counter at it indifferently. "Save your money," she said. And then: "Okay. Wait for me outside."

I went out of the place and waited on the sidewalk. Soon Anne came out wearing over her uniform an old brown coat with a fur collar that would have made any other girl look drab.

"Let's go to my place," she said. "It's just across West a bit."

We crossed darkening Seventh Avenue, turned into a little cul-de-sac, and went into an old brownstone house with a dirty glass door. We climbed a naked, dingy staircase. On the second floor, Anne opened a door. "Come on in."

She turned on a light to combat the twilight. The room was just about as small as a room could be. A bed took up almost all the space. A little dresser was jammed in a corner. There was a red paper shade over the ceiling bulb. A small radio stood on the window sill.

Anne took off her coat and hung it on a peg behind the door.

"Sit down on the bed. It's okay."

I sat down. She crossed to the other side of the bed and sat by the radio. She wasn't embarrassed about the room or the poverty. I suppose she accepted it just the way she accepted everything else.

She picked up her purse and brought out a pack of cigarettes. I offered her mine, but she said: "That's okay. Save them."

I took out my lighter. She leaned toward it, inhaling. The flame from the lighter made a little circle of brightness on her chin. It was a chin for a Pharaoh's daughter. I wondered how it felt to be as beautiful as that and to live in this room.

She was looking at me with a kind of impersonal compassion as if I was just another member of the great army of the distressed.

"Well, honey, just how bad's the trouble?"

"Bad. Nanny didn't kill herself. She was murdered."

There was no flicker in the quiet green eyes. "Sure she was murdered. That's the first thing I thought when I read it in the papers."

I felt a flurry of excitement. "Why?"

"Nanny kill herself? Not that one. She was too busy."

"Busy?"

"Busy to get on, to get up, to get someplace. First day she came to work at the club I got her number—making up to Sylvia, acting so folksy with the other girls, even with me. Anne, dear, this, Anne, darling, that. The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi. Look at her with those Amberleys."

"What about the Amberleys?"

She shrugged. "Just to show how she operated. One evening she came in early and stopped off at the checkroom. Most times she did that, to prove how democratic she was. And this day, she said, 'You know that Miss Amberley who's always come in, Anne, darling? I've just been reading the Social Register in a bookstore and she's in it. A big, grand family in Boston.' And I said, 'So what?' And she said, 'Probably they're rich and there's an unmarried brother, too.' She laughed, made like she was kidding. But right after that Miss Amberley and her brother were in. No sooner you could turn around, Nanny was waiting on them and it not even her table. Next day she had moved in on them."

Fascinated, I said, "That's how it happened with the Amberleys?"

"Sure." Anne's golden fingers were moving up and down on the bedspread as if she were playing some imaginary tune. "Nanny didn't have to keep up a front with me. I was just the hat-check girl. All the time it was that way. 'Who's that one, Anne? Is there anything there, Anne?' Once Errol Flynn was in. You should have seen her. Offered me two bucks to let her give him his coat when he left. Celebrities. Anything with a bank account. Get on the gravy train. That was Nanny."

There she was at last. The real Nanny Ordway—the Nanny who had hidden so cunningly behind Miss Amberley's "best friend," John Amberley's "Henry James lover," m'l "Gloria O'Dream." The real Nanny. The Nanny-spider.

I said, "The Amberleys were crazy about her."

"So was Sylvia. So were all of them."

"John Amberley even asked her to marry him. She stalled."

"Why not? Keep him on ice. If no one bigger and better comes along . . ."

"Me, for example?"

"That's what I thought first thing. A big producer. A celebrity. Who cares that you were married to a glamorous movie star? That wouldn't faze Nanny. Thought she was Garbo and Rita Hayworth rolled into one. Miss Irresistible." She paused. "And then what?"

It was all as clear now as if it had been recorded on film.

"I suppose she figured she couldn't hook me, after all. So she switched."

"To a shakedown?"

"That's it. She was pregnant. And I was the sucker she'd picked for the father. Paternity suit."

Anne nodded. For a moment she sat on the bed in silence. Suddenly she said, "So that's why you killed her?"

There was no censure in her voice, not the faintest trace of anything but the obvious need to state an obvious fact.

I said, "I didn't kill her."

She accepted my word just as simply as she had offered the accusation. "But the cops think you did?"

"They're going to arrest me any minute. They have all the evidence in the world. That's why I wanted to talk to you. And I thought . . ."

"I might know someone?"

"Yes."

She shook her head. "That was six months ago she was working at the club, honey."

"I know, but . . ."

"And me the hat-check girl? I wasn't grand enough to meet her friends."

Clutching at straws, I remembered part of the Amberleys' touching saga of Nanny's life. *She was rooming with another girl. It was all very inconvenient for her.* "What about the girl she was living with before she moved in with the Amberleys?"

"Girl!" Anne echoed. "That wasn't a girl. It was a man."

"You're sure?"

"Yes. She made like it was a girl. At the club she was always

talking about her roommate. But one payday she was sick. She called down, asked me to pick up her pay envelope for her. She told me the address. I took the pay up. There was a man's name on the buzzer and a man came to the door and took the money. Later Nanny said not to tell the others. It was her uncle, she said. But it didn't look good, living with a man in such a small place. That's what she said."

Was this a lead, or just another instance of Nanny's duplicity? I asked, "And the man? Who was he?"

"I don't remember the name. It was like a year ago. But he was kind of older. Good-looking, but older with lots of hair."

"And the apartment?"

"On East Thirty-eighth Street. Number Thirty-eight, was it? Yes, that's it. Thirty-eight East Thirty-eighth Street. Second floor."

I got up from the bed.

"You're going to try?"

"Sure."

She got up, too. She came around the bed and stood close to me.

"Well, good luck."

She smiled. I thought: Of all the people I know, here's the only one who's trusted me. "Thanks, Anne. Thanks a lot."

I glanced around the dreary little room, at the red paper shade on the bulb, at the radio on the chipped window sill.

I said, "I wish there was something . . ."

"There!" Her voice broke in, soft, soothing. "You got enough trouble, honey. Don't you start to worry about me. I got my room. I got my job. Isn't anyone can push me around. I'm okay. Good-by, Mr. Duluth."

"Good night, Anne."

CHAPTER 12

A TAXI dropped me at Thirty-eighth Street and Madison. The street was deserted. A large vacant lot on the corner helped to bring an atmosphere of desolation. I found the house and walked up steps into the little entrance hall.

Second floor, Anne had said. It was dark, and the names under the buzzers were old and blurred. I lit my lighter and moved

the flame along the printed cards. First-floor front . . . First-floor rear . . . Second-floor rear . . .

I looked at the name under the buzzer and excitement shot through me.

The name was Gordon Ling.

Although Gordon had been working in *Star Rising*, I hadn't the faintest idea of where he lived. Now I thought of Anne's description—older, good-looking with lots of hair.

I remembered almost the first words Nanny had ever spoken to me. *I came with some people. They've gone off being glamorous.* Gordon had been at that party. Of course! Gordon had brought her to Lottie's. The flashy, near-failure actor, the little girl on the make—an ideally suited couple—going together to the grand party. Why? For Nanny to pick up a suitable victim for a planned paternity suit?

I pressed the buzzer. An answering click sounded in the front door. I pushed the door inward and ran up the stairs.

Before I could knock at the apartment, Gordon Ling opened the door. He was wearing a bright silk robe over his pants and shirt. When he saw me, his professional smile of welcome faded, giving way to a look of acute uneasiness. "Peter!"

"Yes," I said. "Me."

I pushed past him into the little living room. It was all aggressively masculine with leather and pewter and pipe racks. The walls were plastered with theatrical photographs.

Gordon came hurrying after me. "Peter, what is it you want?"

"What do you think I want? I've come about Nanny Ordway."

He scurried around a chair until he was in front of me. He was fluttery, almost like an old woman. It didn't go with the handsome chiseled features and the pipe racks.

"But you shouldn't be here. The police—they've only just left."

"The police?"

"Lieutenant Trant. He was here—ten minutes ago."

"Why?" I asked.

He ran a hand through his thick black hair. It was a typical, hammy gesture. I'd tried to cure him of it a hundred times at rehearsals. "About Nanny, of course. He'd found out, too. The way you have, I guess. From Sylvia in California."

"Found out what?"

"About Nanny and me. That Nanny was my niece."

His niece! Then Nanny hadn't lied to Anne after all. Depression took hold of me. "You were her uncle?"

"Isn't that what you came about?"

I sat down on one of the red leather chairs. "No. But it'll have to do. Tell me."

He moistened his lips. "You mean—what? What I know about Nanny?"

"Of course."

He was twisting the tasseled ends of his bathrobe cord. "Well, it isn't much, really, I mean—I'd always known she was around. I mean, she was my sister's child and when my sister and her husband died a couple of years ago—well, there was Nanny. But she was in Virginia with some friends of the family until about a year ago, when the people went broke or something. That's when she came to New York—to get a job, she said."

He started pacing up and down the room.

"Of course I took her in, Peter. My only niece. Anyone'd do that. This place isn't big at all and I hadn't planned . . . but she seemed like a nice enough kid; quiet, helpful, didn't want to be a drain on me financially. Getting her a job wasn't easy. But I fixed it at last—with Sylvia. Sylvia and I had been buddies a long time. Sylvia took her in for my sake. After a couple of months Nanny met up with that Amberley girl, and moved in with her."

I watched Gordon. I thought: He isn't lying. He's not a good enough actor to deceive me. This is the way it happened between Nanny and him. The good, quiet niece. Gordon had been another victim.

"That's all?" I asked.

"Yes, that's all of the beginning."

I said, "Why didn't you go to the police when you heard she was dead?"

He flushed—it was a bright, unnatural flush like rouge. "I had my reasons. I was only doing . . . Peter, it seemed the only way under the circumstances. And—and I didn't know then that she'd been murdered."

"But you know now?"

"Yes. Lieutenant Trant told me this evening."

"And you know she was pregnant?"

"Yes, I knew that."

I said, "It was her lover who killed her."

"That's what Trant thinks."

"Do you know who her lover was?"

I had said that just to say it. I hadn't the slightest hope that it would get me anywhere. But Gordon stopped in his tracks. He stood in front of me, looking down at his hands.

"Yes, Peter, I know."

I said, "Tell me."

"Peter, do I have to?"

"Tell me."

He looked up. His face was still flushed and miserable. "Honest, Peter, I wasn't prying. When she left to live with Miss Amberley, I knew she still had a key to this place. That was okay with me. She even left some of her stuff here. After you'd given me the job in *Star Rising*, she came around backstage a couple of times to see me, but that was all. I was leading my life. I was letting her lead hers."

"Did you take her to that party at Lottie's?"

"What party? Oh, no. I just saw her there. Across the room. Didn't even get a chance to speak to her. And it was after that, anyway, that I started noticing . . . I mean, about matinee afternoons. . . ." He broke off.

"Matinee afternoons?"

"You know, I'd come back after the show tired. Wouldn't notice much. Sometimes, maybe, I thought the place looked kind of different—too neat sometimes, not neat enough other times. Then it started to dawn on me. Somebody's been here, I thought. Someone's coming here every matinee afternoon and then sometimes in the evenings, too. I thought right away of Nanny, of course. Who else could it be?"

"She'd told me not to call her at Miss Amberley's. So I wrote her a note and asked her to come around. When she came, I asked point blank: Have you been coming here? She was just as frank with me. She had a boy friend, she said—and there were reasons why she couldn't entertain him at Miss Amberley's. She should have asked me, she said. But she hadn't thought I would mind . . . and, Peter, I didn't go into it, honest. I'm not the heavy uncle. I told her it was okay. And that was that."

Once again my hopes were rising. Gordon Ling wasn't the man but he was leading directly toward him.

Gordon was looking at me earnestly, with an embarrassment

I found both baffling and unsettling. "I'd never have known, Peter, if it hadn't been for that last time. Just—just the day before she died when she came here and . . ."

Once again he gave up. Infected by his uneasiness, I asked: "Came here—and what?"

"Well," he blurted, "she told me everything. Poor kid, probably she was as much to blame as anyone, but you couldn't help feeling sorry for her. She was in such a state, carrying on, half out of her mind, sobbing her heart out. She told me it all, how desperately in love she was, how she'd hoped for the divorce, how she'd realized it couldn't ever be and the only thing was for her to give it up, how she'd tried to be brave but how it was hopeless now because she was almost sure she was going to have a baby. She begged me over and over again: couldn't I please do something?"

That was the sort of dramatic scene which normally Gordon thought he did well. But he was terrible at it now as if he'd played it out of town to disastrous notices and had lost his nerve.

"After all, Peter, I was her uncle. It was up to me to do something. I tried to comfort her. I said, 'You've got to tell me the man's name. If he's responsible for all this, if you really love him, he's got to get a divorce and marry you. Don't worry,' I said. 'I'll go to him. I'll make him see he's got to do it. Tell me his name.'"

Hope had made me slow-witted. I realized that then. With shocking clarity, the reason behind Gordon's excruciating embarrassment dawned on me.

"So she told you his name, Gordon?"

He was looking down sheepishly at the carpet. "That's right."

He came suddenly to me and gripped my hands. We were the two sophisticated men about town helping each other through a difficult scene.

"Honest, Peter, I'd never dreamed it was you. When she told me, you can imagine how I felt. I'd said I'd stand by her. I was her uncle. There she was crying, talking about suicide. I knew it was my duty. But—with Iris and you . . . I mean, when you'd been so good to me, giving me my first big part in years and . . ."

I said, "So you decided not to go to the police at all—for my sake?"

"Yes, Peter." A quick smile came. "Yes, boy. That's it."

"But now—this evening—you've told all this to Trant?"

The smile fled and the sincere expression was back.

"Peter, I hated to. Honest, I did. But when he said it was murder! That's serious. You can get into terrible trouble if you hold back evidence on murder."

"Sure," I said. "Sure you can, Gordon."

I looked at him. I thought gloomily of Lieutenant Trant. He had everything now—a handwriting expert to say the suicide note was a fake, the M.E. to say the hanging had been a phony—and now Gordon Ling, the "victim's" uncle with a story as good as a death warrant for me.

I said, "Okay, Gordon, I've only one thing to say. Two things. I never had anything to do with Nanny Ordway. And I didn't kill her."

He jumped at that. I didn't for a moment think he believed me, but it was the perfect cue to shake off "uncle" and become the producer's little pal again.

"Of course, Peter, I never thought you did. That's what I told Trant right away. 'Peter a murderer?' I said. 'Why, that's crazy.'"

I got up.

Sharply, Gordon said, "Peter, you're going?"

He hadn't meant to read relief into that line, but it was there.

"That's right," I said.

"But—but where?" He clutched my arm—the Scarlet Pimpernel's best friend warning him against the tumbrel. "Peter, don't go to your apartment. Trant, he—I mean, he almost said he was going there to arrest you."

"No," I said. "I won't go to the apartment."

"Then—where?"

Where indeed? "Oh, somewhere," I said.

CHAPTER 13

OUT ON Thirty-eighth Street again, I went into a drugstore and ordered coffee and a sandwich. My session with Gordon had not been entirely barren. At least I knew for certain now that Trant, like me, believed that Nanny had been killed by her lover. The only difference was that Trant was convinced that the lover had been I.

How could I prove that I hadn't been?

It all boiled down to a question of time. When she died, Nanny

had been five or six weeks pregnant. How long had I actually known her? That was easy. I had met her the day Iris left for Jamaica. October sixth. And she had been killed on November ninth. How long was that? Four weeks and six days. The tiniest margin of one day! That wasn't enough to prove anything to anyone. If only there was another date—a date that could definitely place Nanny with a lover before the sixth of October.

Suddenly, as I sipped my coffee, I thought of John Amberley. He'd told me he had proposed to Nanny on his birthday. And Claire Amberley—hadn't she said just after his announcement: *That's when I made her confide in me, the day she'd told John to wait. I knew there was another man. I'd suspected it for some time.*

For some time before her brother's birthday! If John Amberley's birthday had been before October sixth, that would be proof.

I got up and paid my check at the cashier's desk. Hope was in the saddle again. Maybe Miss Amberley, my most merciless enemy, would turn out to be my savior after all. I picked up a taxi and said: "Thirty-one Charlton Street."

I knew Miss Amberley too well now to take any chances with her. Down in the submerged little foyer of Number 31, I pressed the buzzer for the apartment above hers. The click came in the door. I hurried up the stairs to her apartment and knocked.

"Who is it?"

"Trant," I said in the voice that had done me service already that day. "Lieutenant Trant."

The door started to open. I pushed through and shut it behind me.

Miss Amberley was standing in front of me. Her bulging green eyes, hard as metal, were glaring at me with an expression of mingled indignation and alarm.

"I—I thought it was Lieutenant Trant."

I took a step toward her. What Miss Amberley needs, I thought, is a good sharp shock.

I said, "You know, of course, that Nanny was murdered?"

"Murdered!" She echoed the word in a strange little piping gasp. Instinctively she cringed away from me. I took advantage of it.

"She was murdered and Trant's going to arrest me. He's looking for me now. I might just as well have two murders to my credit as one."

I had said that with obvious sarcasm, but, incredibly, she took it as a threat. Her face seemed to dissolve into a pattern of terror.

With a lightning movement that almost took me unawares, she spun around toward the telephone. I jumped on her and caught her wrists.

"No . . . no . . . no."

"Will you tell me what I want to know?"

"Anything."

"Your brother proposed to Nanny on his birthday, didn't he?"

"Yes, yes. You know that. He told you."

"But, before that, you'd suspected she had a lover. Isn't that what you said? Before the birthday?"

"Yes, of course. Weeks before I knew."

"When is your brother's birthday?"

"October," she said. "October the second."

October second! And I had met Nanny Ordway on October sixth. It worked. I had pulled it off.

I said, "And on that same day, on October the second, you made her admit she had a lover?"

"Yes, that's right. I told you."

"But she didn't mention my name—not until much later?"

"No." For a moment her hatred of me got the better of her panic. "But of course it was you. She didn't mention your name. But what difference does that make—when she described you."

"Described me?"

"Yes," said Miss Amberley. "The husband of a famous actress."

Even now, that moment, of all the many startling moments of the day, is most vivid in my mind. Because there, suddenly out of the blue, was a solution. It hit me with a staggering impact.

I hurried out of the apartment and ran down the stairs.

There were a dozen different things to be thought of, but, from them all, it was the image of Iris which rose up, dwarfing everything else. In the last few hectic hours, there had been no time to pamper my misery at the loss of my wife. But now that release had miraculously come, I could think only of Iris.

She'd been to Alec's party. Certainly Alec had approached her about the play in England. Maybe, in her manufactured mood of hatred for me, she'd already signed to go to London. I ran into a candy store and dialed her hotel. They told me she wasn't there.



Then she was still at Alec's. I phoned his suite at the Pierre. His quiet, amiable voice said: "Hello."

"Alec," I said. "This is Peter. Is Iris there?"

He paused a moment. "I'm sorry, Peter. She's just left."

The pause had given him away. "She's there," I said. "Alec, I've got to talk to her. It's desperately important. I . . ."

"One moment."

There was another pause. Then Iris's voice came, cool, studiously hostile. "Really, Peter, Alec's reading me his play."

"I've got to see you."

"But there's nothing to see me about."

I said, "Nanny was murdered."

I could hear her draw in her breath rapidly. "No."

"Trant's got all the evidence in the world. He's going to arrest me."

"Peter!"

"I've got to see you."

"Of course." It was wonderful to hear the old, natural voice, the unthinking sympathy. "Of course, Peter. I'll come right away. Where are you? At the apartment?"

"No. And we can't go there. Probably the police are watching it."

"How about Mother's apartment? I have a key."

"That's fine."

She hung up. When I reached Iris's mother's apartment on Eighty-fourth Street, I took the elevator up to the twelfth floor. I knocked on the door. Iris opened it immediately. She was wearing a very grand cocktail dress.

"Peter!"

She shut the door and led me into the living room, which was eerily shrouded in dust covers against her mother's return from Jamaica. She'd had time to think. She was a little suspicious.

"Peter, you didn't make that up? If you did . . ."

"I didn't make it up. She was murdered."

"And Trant thinks you murdered her?"

"He knows it."

"The fool!"

The spontaneity with which she had said that banished my last, lingering anxieties.

"You don't think I killed her?" I said.

"You? Commit a murder? Don't be silly." She crossed the room and stood in front of me. There was a trace of a smile on her face. "Besides, you'd never be that dumb. Kill someone in your own apartment? Hang her from your own chandelier?"

There it was, the great reconciliation scene achieved with only a couple of lines of dialogue. I told her all I'd done since Miss Mills had brought me the news. I finished with Miss Amberley.

"You see? On October second, Nanny admitted that she had a lover. I didn't meet her until October sixth, the day you left."

Now the simple part was over. The difficult part was beginning. I got up off the couch. I said, "Iris, baby. I know who it is. Nanny's lover. The man who killed her."

Her lips parted in astonishment.

"It's a cinch," I said. "Nanny used to go around backstage to see Gordon after *Star Rising* opened. He told me that. We know what she was like now, always on the prowl, trying to climb, fixated on celebrities. Gordon didn't take her to that party at Lottie's. How did she get there except through someone from the company? When Nanny admitted to Miss Amberley that she had a lover, four days before she'd met me, she gave the clue. She said her lover was the husband of a famous actress."

Iris was looking at me, half incredulous, half horrified. "You can't mean . . . Peter, not Brian!"

"Brian. Of course. Who else could it be?"

"But he's so sweet. He—he was always trying to help us."

"A conscience, maybe?"

Iris put her hand on my sleeve. "What are you going to do? Tell Trant?"

"With so little proof? A few stray sentences that nobody ever heard? No, it's better to go to Brian, to try to break him."

"You think you can?"

"I've got to. You call Lottie. Get her out of the apartment. Say you need her. Say you're unhappy. She'll come running."

"Now?"

"Yes, now."

She went to the phone. She talked for a few moments and hung up. "It worked. Poor Lottie, she was thrilled. *I knew you'd need me.* She said it over and over again. And Brian's there. She's going to my hotel right away. I'll have to leave."

"So will I."



"But maybe Trant will be at the apartment, waiting for you."

"That's a chance I'll have to take."

She came to me suddenly, putting her arms around me. "Darling, how are you ever going to forgive me?"

"For what?"

"For the things I've said, for the things I've thought. Peter, I wanted so hard not to be a stinker. And—in the end—I was worse than Lottie. Much worse. I'm sorry. Darling, I'm so sorry. . . ."

I kissed her on the shoulder, on the throat and on the mouth. I thought: There's something to be said for unhappiness. It's so pleasant when it stops.

"Hurry, baby," I said. "You don't want Lottie to get there ahead of you."

CHAPTER 14

I WENT back to our apartment house. I had expected the police to be watching it. But there was no sign of them. Bill, rather sheepish, I thought, was on the elevator.

I said, "Take me up to Miss Marin's, will you, Bill?"

Everyone in the building referred to that apartment as "Miss Marin's." Probably half of the employees didn't even know Brian's last name was Mullen.

It was odd to feel depressed now that I was struggling out of the trap. But the switch had been too quick for me. I hadn't yet stopped thinking of Brian as my friend.

It was a preposterous attitude, of course. He wasn't my friend any more. He was a murderer who had pinned the blame for his crime on me. That was how I had to think of him.

Brian opened the door for me with his usual cheerful grin. His hair was flopping down across his forehead. He was in shirt sleeves with a frilly apron tied around his waist.

"Hi, Peter. Just been cleaning the bathroom. Lottie can create more chaos in five minutes. She's out, by the way. Iris called her. She forgot her nervous breakdown and ran."

"I know," I said. "I asked Iris to call her. I wanted to talk to you."

"Fine." His grin broadened. He sat down opposite me on a stool, crossing his knees. "Okay. What's on your mind?"

This wasn't at all the way the scene should have started. Could he really be as bland as this and still be guilty? Of course he could. It is only folklore to suppose that murderers are hounded by their consciences.

I said, "I've been talking to Gordon."

"Gordon? Gordon Ling?"

"He knows about you and Nanny, Brian." That was obviously the most effective lie. "He's found out you were the one she'd been taking to his place."

I had, I supposed, expected him to deny it or at least to be flustered. I was astonished when he merely threw out his hands with a wry little smile and said:

"So he tumbled to it, did he? I thought he would—sooner or later." He paused. "He hasn't told Lottie, has he?"

"No."

"Thank heaven for that!" And then, "I'm glad you've found out. I should have told you long ago."

"You should?"

"Of course. But it was Lottie, Peter. I was scared to death she'd get onto it. And, with the suicide established and everything, I figured: Peter's in it anyway. How's it going to help him if I mess myself up in it, too? You do understand? You don't think I'm too much of a heel?"

His expression had just the correct amount of ruefulness and charm. He was even smoother than I had thought.

I said, "You'd better tell me about it."

"All of it, Peter? From the beginning?"

"Yes."

"Honest, if I'd thought I could have helped you by telling earlier . . ."

"Sure."

"Then you're not mad at me."

He smiled gratefully and, leaning forward, patted my knee.

And Lottie, I thought, had never let him be an actor!

"Now, when did I meet her?" He was puckering his forehead. "Can't exactly remember, but it was quite early in the run of *Star Rising*. It was one night just after curtain time. I'd been down at the theater with Lottie and was going home. I was coming out of the stage door—and so was this girl. We walked together down the alley. I hardly noticed her, matter of fact. Then, suddenly, I

felt her hand on my sleeve. 'Excuse me,' she said, 'but aren't you Charlotte Marin's husband?' I said: 'Sure.' She said: 'I thought so. Being Charlotte Marin's husband! How wonderful that must be! We started talking then as we walked along. She told me she was Gordon's niece. I didn't have anything to do that evening. Almost before I realized it, I was asking her if she felt like dinner. She said: 'Oh, that would be marvelous. I could eat a bear.'''

In spite of the circumstances, I felt stealing over me the fascination which any new glimpse into Nanny Ordway's life always brought me. The parallel between Brian's first meeting with her and my own was terrifyingly close. The light hand on the sleeve—the oblique praise . . . and then: *Oh, no, I don't want a drink, but I'm simply starved. . . .*

They had met more and more often. Even though Brian had been careful to keep it all from Lottie, it had been a perfectly innocent relationship. And then, one afternoon, Nanny had invited him to tea at Gordon's.

For the first time a faint flush spread over his face. "That was when—when the other thing began, Peter. And then, once it had happened, you can't imagine the change in her. She loved me, she said. She'd been crazy about me from the first moment she saw me. She'd love me forever. She'd die for me."

He got up from the stool. "I was in a stew. You don't have to believe this, but it's true. I'd never been unfaithful to Lottie before. I hadn't wanted to be. I was all mixed up and—and scared to death about Lottie. Because, if she found out . . . You know Lottie, Peter. You know the way she is."

I knew Lottie. I was beginning to know Brian. But, above all, I now knew Nanny Ordway supremely well.

"I'd wanted to stop it right there, Peter. But somehow it dragged on and on. All the time she was getting crazier and crazier about me. Then, one day, she said she couldn't go on like that. I had to tell Lottie and get a divorce."

Technically, I suppose, I felt sorry for him. With his vanity and foolish optimism, he had been such an easy victim for the Nanny-spider—a helpless male spider, destined to be devoured by his mate. But my sympathy was tinged with contempt. However boyish and charming he was, he was a murderer. No, when the time came to jump in and trip him up, it wasn't going to worry me.

"... I was horrified, Peter. I mean, about the divorce thing. I—I tried to explain how impossible it would be. I owed everything to Lottie, I said. And not only that. Without Lottie, I wouldn't have a cent. She'd throw me right out, I said. How could Nanny and I live on nothing?"

He was pacing up and down the room now, explaining how he had argued and pleaded with Nanny. As he told it, his guileless belief that everything would be all right just because he wanted it to be all right had been almost incredible. He had suspected no ulterior purpose when she had asked him to slip her into Lottie's party. He had even been naive enough, after he had known she was cultivating me, not to speculate on her motives.

"I saw her all the time at Gordon's, after the party, Peter. And she did talk about some plan she had. But—I was dumb, I guess—I never linked up her plan with you. I suppose, back of my mind, I was hoping she'd switch to you and give me a let-out. For a while, I even kidded myself it would happen that way." The tip of his tongue came out to moisten his lip. "But, of course, I'd never made a bigger mistake in my life.

"Peter"—his voice was awkward now—"do you think I should go on?"

"Why not, Brian?"

"I mean—this is strictly between you and me. You understand that, don't you?"

For a moment I was staggered. He was even more staggeringly stupid and conceited than I had imagined. He had found it painful to have to keep to himself the fact that he had murdered Nanny. He was welcoming an opportunity to get it off his chest. All I had to do was to sit there and let him convict himself out of his own mouth. "Sure, Brian," I said. "Of course I understand. This is strictly between you and me. Go on."

A relieved smile spread across his face. "Okay, Peter. I'll feel a lot better going the whole way. You see, it all came to a head the—the day she died. That morning, around noon, she called me from downstairs in your apartment. Luckily Lottie was out at the photographer's. She said she had wonderful news. I was to come down right away. When I got there, she was radiant. She threw her arms around my neck. She said, 'It's all right, darling. All our problems are solved at last. My plan worked. I've fixed it.' I hadn't the slightest idea what she was talking about, Peter. I swear

it. And when she explained, I could hardly believe it. I mean, I'd never dreamed a girl could be like that. You know, of course?"

I said, "She told you how she'd framed me?"

He nodded. "That and—and how she was pregnant. She told me that first and it pretty much threw me. We were having a baby, she said. Wasn't that wonderful? Then I got the other thing full in the face—how she'd planted the evidence against you with her roommate, with Gordon, with Lucia, with Iris—everything. 'It's a cinch,' she said. 'When the time comes, I'll slap a paternity suit on him. With all that proof, he's never going to take it to court. I'll get a great fat settlement. All we've got to do is wait a while. Then when I collect, you can divorce Lottie. We'll have enough money to live together with our baby.'"

He broke off. I could see it all as if I'd been there. The Nanny-spider out in the open at last—ready to devour her mate.

"Somehow, Peter, I went on stalling. I asked her at least to give me time to think. Finally she said she'd give me till three o'clock. And if I didn't agree by then . . ."

There was a sudden commotion in the hall. He broke off. We both sprang to our feet. Lottie came storming into the living room, followed by Iris.

"Peter Duluth, what is this? What are you up to?" She was wearing a black hat with an eye veil. It was an absurd hat, glamorous for someone else but not for Lottie. "The idea! Trying to fool me! The moment I saw Iris, I could tell she was furtive about something. Plotting, planning. What are you saying to Brian?"

She took up her position squarely in front of him. He looked as uncomfortable as I felt. "It's nothing," he said. "It . . ."

The front-door buzzer sounded. It was almost a relief. At least it made a distraction.

Iris said, "I'll go."

She went out into the hall. Lottie, Brian and I stood around like very bad actors in a very bad play with no direction at all.

I could hear voices from the hall. Then Iris reappeared.

"It's . . ." she began.

But there wasn't any need for her to go on.

Lieutenant Trant came strolling after her into the room.

HE WAS smiling his grave, ominous smile. He was exactly the way I had visualized he would be when he finally came to arrest

me. I felt suddenly, ferociously angry with Lottie. If she hadn't barged in, I'd have got the confession from Brian. Now, of course, he would clam up. Now I had nothing.

"Good evening," Trant said.

We were all looking at him with varying degrees of uneasiness. It was Lottie who took hold of the scene.

"What on earth are you doing here?"

"I'm afraid I don't bring very good news. Certainly it'll be a shock for some of you." He paused—deliberately, it seemed to me, ignoring my presence. "Nanny Ordway didn't commit suicide, Miss Marin. She was murdered."

"Murder!" Lottie exclaimed. "What nonsense. What nonsense everyone's talking tonight."

"I'm sorry, Miss Marin. It isn't nonsense."

Trant was watching Brian now. Slowly, almost leisurely, he started to move toward him. "I apologize, Mr. Mullen, for my low habits, but this evening, when you and your wife were out to dinner, I had a microphone installed"—he gestured toward a semiabstract portrait of Lottie—"right behind that picture. There's a recording machine down in Mr. Duluth's apartment. I've been sitting down there, listening to everything you've been saying."

Lottie was looking at him. She was very quiet now, but it was the quiet she used on the stage before she built to a big scene. Any minute, I knew, she was going to butt in.

Trant was still moving toward Brian. "You cleared up most of the things I was still doubtful about, Mr. Mullen. But, thanks to your wife's interruption, you didn't carry your story quite far enough, did you? You should have told Mr. Duluth how you went down at three, how Nanny Ordway threatened to make your life impossible if you didn't fall in with her plans. You should have told him how you murdered her—as the only way to save your marriage."

I was listening with an extraordinary mixture of bewilderment and relief. For some improbable reason, Trant wasn't hounding me any more. He had the solution.

Iris had been standing beside me. Now, quickly, she crossed to Lottie. That made me, too, remember Lottie with a prick of alarm. I looked across at her. Her face was terrifying because it had become suddenly sagging and old.

"Of course, Mr. Mullen"—Trant's quiet, penetrating voice was sounding again—"if you'd told Mr. Duluth all that, it would have been embarrassing to explain why you left the body in his apartment where it would certainly implicate him. But, after all, Mr. Duluth's an understanding man. He would have appreciated your problem. The body was there. You could hardly lug it away. At least you did your best to make it look like suicide—with the chandelier, the faked suicide note . . ."

"But," gasped Brian, "but that wasn't it. That—that isn't true."

"Isn't it?" snapped Trant. "You didn't go down to Mr. Duluth's apartment again at three o'clock?"

"No."

"Then at least she called you."

"Oh, yes." Brian seemed to be regaining a little control. "She called—around three fifteen."

"And what did you say?"

Brian's face was crimson.

"I wanted to tell her to go to hell. But, all afternoon, I'd been sitting here, figuring, and I'd decided: What was the point of going against her? If I did, she'd tell Lottie." He gestured helplessly toward his wife. "Once Lottie knew, she'd throw me out. I knew if I went against her I'd lose everything. I guess if I'd had any guts I'd have done something, but . . . I didn't. I thought if—if I strung along with her, at least it would give me a couple of months. Something might always turn up, I thought. So that's what I told her on the phone. I said I'd let her go ahead and sue Peter, and when the time came I'd get a divorce. . . . I gave in all along the line. And it satisfied her. She said I wouldn't ever regret it, that—that she loved me. And she hung up."

He was looking down at the carpet. "That was all, Lieutenant. You're crazy to say I killed her. She hung up and I never saw her again. If you don't believe me, ask Lottie. She came in just after that, about ten minutes later. I was here. She can prove that."

Trant had been listening with his own peculiar brand of silence which managed to question each statement and somehow make it seem improbable and false. His voice was implacable now.

"So that's how you claim it happened?"

"That's how it did happen."

"Tell me," Trant was repeating, "if you didn't kill her, Mr. Mullen, who did?"

It was then that Lottie moved. It was the slightest of movements, but I knew the trick so well from her acting. It was the first, deliberately small movement after complete stillness—and it always worked. All of us, almost before we realized it, had turned to look at her.

She had her face back under control. She still looked too elaborate and overglamorized in the terrible hat, but, behind the veil, her eyes were as clear, as gimlet sharp, as ever.

For a moment the gimlet gaze was settled on me. Then, very slowly, she turned it to Trant. "All this is really true, Lieutenant? You're sure this—this little girl was murdered?"

Trant seemed as much under her spell as the rest of us.

"There isn't any doubt about it, Miss Marin."

Suddenly she swung around to me. Her hand came out, pointing. "There he is!" she exclaimed. "There is the murderer of Nanny Ordway."

The finger was still pointing as she turned to Trant. "From the start I've known it, but, fool that I was, I tried to protect him because he was my friend. That day, around three fifteen, I came back from the photographer's. My new pictures were ready. I wanted them put up outside the theater that night. I stopped off at Peter's floor to tell him. I went to the door. I was going to knock. Then I heard voices—Peter's voice . . . a girl's voice . . ."

She paused for the fraction of a second, then the beautiful voice in all its rich sonority boomed on: "I heard the girl say: 'No . . . no . . . no . . . please!' I stood there, with my hand up to the door. Then I heard Peter's voice. It was loud, fierce. 'I'll fix you,' he said. That's what he said. 'I'll fix you.' That's when I thought: This is not for me. I came up the stairs to the apartment. Brian was here. I found him right here in this room, reading the paper."

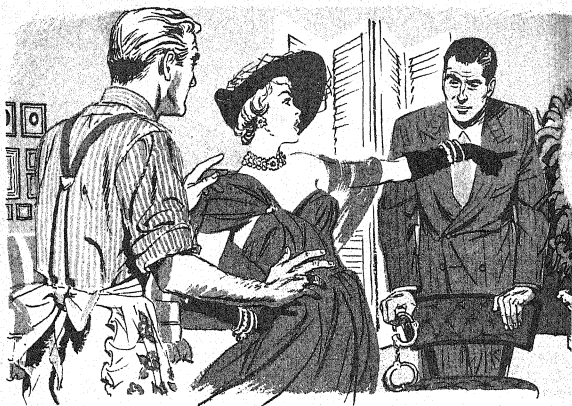
She moved to Brian and put her hand protectively on his arm.

"There, Lieutenant. There it is. That's all I have to say."

CHAPTER 15

"PETER!"

Iris ran to my side. I was staring with shocked incredulity at Lottie. She was perfectly serene now, slightly lofty as if she had



said her piece and was above any tiresome details that might still have to be settled.

There was the faintest trace of a smile on Trant's lips as he watched her. He was happy. Of course he was. His ruse had worked. Peter Duluth was finally in the trap.

He said: "Miss Marin, you're prepared to come around to the station house and make a sworn statement of what you've just said?"

"Naturally." Lottie, the *grande dame*, shrugged. "If it's necessary."

Very quietly, Trant said: "I don't recommend it, Miss Marin."

"You don't recommend it? Why not?"

Trant's smile was a real smile now, not just the suggestion of one. "Because I never recommend perjury."

"Perjury!" exclaimed Lottie.

"Yes, Miss Marin. Your story was very convincing, but there's one unfortunate hitch. You couldn't have heard Mr. Duluth in his apartment at three: at three Mr. Duluth was at a movie."



"Pooh." Lottie waved an arm. "That's just what he says."

"That's what I thought, too, Miss Marin. But I'm afraid I made as much of a fool of myself as you. A couple of hours ago, one of my men brought in the boy who'd been collecting the tickets at the theater that afternoon. He'd been sick and we'd had difficulty locating him. But finally they brought him in."

Trant flashed me a glance. That was the first time, since his arrival, that he'd paid me any attention at all.

"As it happens, Miss Marin, the ticket collector is a would-be actor. He's been around to all the producers' offices many times. The moment Mr. Duluth turned in his ticket at two thirty, he recognized him. He recognized him again when he came out at four o'clock. There's no doubt about the day, either. Mr. Duluth has an alibi which nothing on earth can break."

It was only then that Lottie's godlike poise collapsed. Even though half of me was absorbed with the miracle of Trant's, against all expectations, becoming my champion, I noticed it with grim satisfaction.

She had broken away from Brian, throwing out her hand in a feeble little gesture that meant nothing at all. For a moment, the silence was extreme. It was Iris who broke it. Her face was clouded with astonishment and shock.

"Lieutenant," she exclaimed, "did she make all that up about Peter?"

"I'm afraid she did."

"Of all the low-down . . ."

My wife lunged forward toward Lottie. Trant caught her arm.

"Now, Mrs. Duluth—please . . ."

His voice was soft, almost paternal. Iris glanced back at me.

I said, "Let it go, baby."

She came back to my side, still seething with indignation.

Trant turned to Brian. "Okay, Mr. Mullen, you're under arrest."

"No!" cried Lottie.

Trant ignored her. There was a new harshness, a melodramatic quality to him which was quite unfamiliar to me. He was being the theatrical cop, something out of the movies, not at all the Lieutenant Trant I had known.

"You'll come with me, Mr. Mullen. And I don't advise you to make difficulties. I have men outside."

He pulled out a pair of handcuffs, and grabbed at Brian's unresisting wrist. The handcuffs flashed as he brought them forward.

Lottie flew at him. "Don't! Don't do it!"

"Why not?"

"You can't."

Astonishingly Trant whipped around and grabbed her arms.

"Why not? Why shouldn't I arrest him?"

"Because . . . he didn't do it."

I'd never seen Lottie like that before. She had no dignity, no presence. She was just struggling blindly.

Trant's voice was dominating, metallic. "Why didn't he do it, Miss Marin? How do you know?"

"I know. . . ."

"Because you killed her yourself! That's it—isn't it? You came home around three fifteen. You let yourself into the hall. You heard your husband in here on the phone. You heard enough of what he was saying to make you curious. You tiptoed out to the kitchen. You picked up the extension. And you heard her—you heard Nanny Ordway downstairs. You heard her say: 'Your

place is with me and my baby.' And you heard your husband say: 'Yes, I admit it. I'll get a divorce.'"

Lottie, still held by the arms, had stopped struggling. But her passivity was almost worse than the hysterical violence that had gone before it. She seemed hypnotized, unable to move, to think, to do anything but listen.

"Yes," Trant was saying, "that's how it happened. You listened. You put down the receiver. You went down by the back stairs. Your husband! you thought. The man that belonged to you! That girl was trying to take him away from you. You knocked on the door. She let you in. You said: 'I know all about you. You're going to leave my husband alone.' And she laughed at you, didn't she? 'What do you think you can do about it?' she said. 'He's mine. You think you can compete with me—an old wreck like you?'"

He threw the words straight at her white, stricken face. It was horribly vivid, as if, by some uncanny trick, he had taken us all back into that room.

"Her scarf was there, wasn't it, Miss Marin? It was lying there, maybe over the back of a chair. . . . You were furious—bewildered, frightened, hurt. You picked up the scarf, you . . ."

"No!" shouted Lottie suddenly. "No, no."

Trant's hands were still on her arms. "You deny that's what happened? Then your husband will go to jail; he'll be tried, convicted, killed, Miss Marin. The man you committed murder for will be killed!"

She twisted out of his grasp and ran to Brian, throwing herself against him.

"I'd known it," she cried. "For weeks I'd known there was someone. But I never realized it was she—that scheming, sly, pale little slut. . . . She wasn't going to take you away from me."

Trant's face was almost gray now. He moved across after her.

"All right, Miss Marin? You'll come with me?"

"You're mine," Lottie was babbling. "You're mine, Brian. You're all I've got."

"Miss Marin, you'll come with me to the station house?"

She gave an almost invisible nod.

Trant said to Brian, "You'd better take her in the bedroom. See she gets some things packed."

Brian put his arm around his wife's waist and guided her into

the next room. Trant watched them and then dropped down onto the arm of a chair. I saw that his hands were shaking.

It had happened so quickly, so unexpectedly that my thoughts were skittering around. But already I could see the inevitability of the motive. *Lottie owns Brian*. You couldn't take anything from Lottie. No one could. Not even Nanny Ordway.

I looked at Trant. I saw now what his ruse had been and I felt a kind of awed admiration. "You accused Brian from the beginning to try to force her to confess?"

He glanced up and nodded.

"And I thought . . ."

The corners of his mouth twisted in a slight smile. "That I was going to arrest you. I'm sorry, Mr. Duluth. I've got a lot of apologies to make to you."

"But how did you figure it out?"

"Once your alibi was confirmed, once I'd talked to Gordon Ling, it was easy enough to get onto Mr. Mullen's part of it. And then I thought—well, on the character side, I couldn't see Mr. Mullen as a killer, but . . ."

"You could see Lottie?"

"Yes. I could see Miss Marin."

And now that he had completed the puzzle, I could see it, too. There had been an almost terrifying consistency in the pattern. Male spiders don't kill female spiders. Flies don't kill spiders, either. It had needed a worthy antagonist to kill Nanny Ordway. What are the spiders' mortal enemies? The wasps.

Lottie, the wasp, had destroyed the Nanny-spider.

I was still looking at Trant, thinking that I owed him as many apologies as he owed me. Nanny Ordway's dupe—that was what I'd thought of him. How wrong I had been.

"And that's all you had?" I asked. "Just a hunch?"

He threw out a hand. "I'm afraid I'm not that much of a wizard, Mr. Duluth. No, I had evidence, but it wasn't really enough to stand on its own without a confession." He paused. "When I was first up here, I noticed a lot of doodles on the telephone pad. Even though I had you picked out as the murderer then, I don't like to let anything pass. I knew there'd be a question of drawing with the suicide note. So I picked them up and shipped them over to the handwriting expert. His report came back this evening. He's ready to testify that the doodles and

the drawing of the hanged girl were made by the same person."

I thought back to the day when Lottie had picked up Nanny's drawing. The gimlet glance. *Whatever is this?*

And all that was still muddled fell into place. Lottie Marin had killed Nanny Ordway as a passionately possessive woman fighting to keep what was hers. But to have killed is terrible and to go on living after you have killed is unendurable unless there is some support. Lottie had had the perfect support. She was an actress.

Most of her life both on and off the stage had been acting. How natural that, from the moment after the murder, the actress should have taken control. She must have known her only hope was to fake a suicide, and once she'd done it, once she'd torn off the title page of the story and doodled the hanged girl, once she'd somehow lugged the body up to the chandelier . . . Lottie Marin, the actress trained to believe her role, had already started to believe the suicide.

Probably it had not been hard for her, because the role she had had to play from then on had been nothing but Lottie Marin—Lottie Marin swooping down to welcome Iris home, discovering the body, accusing me of driving "the poor little girl" to suicide, Lottie Marin doing and saying all the things that Lottie Marin would say and do.

Yes, it had all been consistent. And it was wonderful in a way—even the magnificent shamelessness of that final pointing, accusing finger. I felt a sudden, unreasonable sadness. Lottie had been a great actress.

Trant had got up from the chair. I said, "I guess you've got her now, Lieutenant. A confession in front of witnesses . . ."

"Yes." He glanced at me and there seemed to be in his eyes a trace of my own regret. "Knowing what Nanny Ordway was—" He shrugged. "But I don't like murder, and I guess I've got this murderer."

My mind, racing forward into the future, was full of new speculations. "I wouldn't be too sure."

"Not sure, Mr. Duluth?"

"Right now she's down. Wait till she's up again. Just wait till you see her at the trial. Before she's through, she'll have that jury carrying her out of the courtroom on their shoulders—cheering."

Lottie and Brian emerged from the bedroom. Brian was carrying a small case. Lottie didn't even look at us. She went right on to the door. Brian and Trant followed her.

For a moment Iris and I stood there together in silence. Then we went down to our own apartment. We sat down on the couch and neither of us said anything for quite a time. But gradually, with Lottie away, with the power of her personality fading, I came back to myself. I was Peter Duluth with a wife—Peter Duluth unexpectedly reprieved from the abyss.

Slowly it was coming back to me—that wonderful, half-forgotten feeling that life was ordinary, that a day was just a day, that you wake up in the morning and there is your wife and you have your breakfast and you . . .


"Peter." Iris twisted around on the couch, her face still grave and reflective. "I've been thinking."

"Yes?"

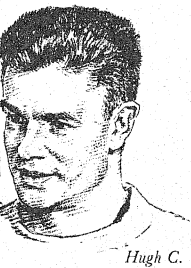
"Miss Mills says the part in *Let Live* would be fine for me."

"Do it," I said. "Do it, baby. It'd be perfect for you."

She was in my arms, clinging to me. The feeling of life re-established was growing, swelling. It was wonderful.



Richard W. Webb



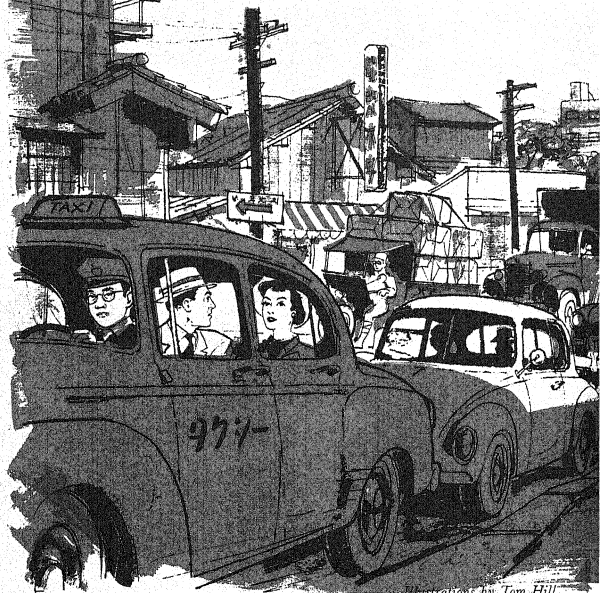
Hugh C. Wheeler

PATRICK QUENTIN is one of three pseudonyms used by the writing team of Richard W. Webb and Hugh C. Wheeler. Both men were British born; both are now American citizens and served in the U.S. Army in World War II.

In the course of a long collaboration they have produced more than thirty mystery novels, twenty novelettes and nearly a hundred short stories. They were prize winners in the annual Ellery Queen mystery contest for seven consecutive years—the only writers to achieve this distinction.

Black Widow, rated by *The New York Times* as one of the top mysteries of its year, was bought by Twentieth Century-Fox and made into a major motion picture featuring Ginger Rogers, Gene Tierney and Van Heflin.

STOPOVER:



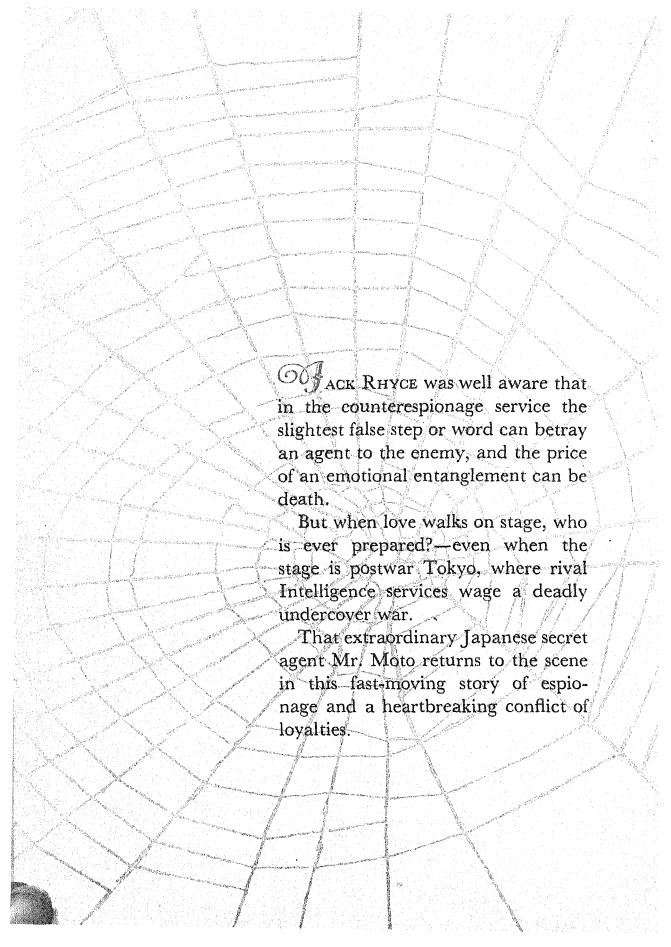
Illustrations by Tom Hill

TOKYO

A condensation of the book by
JOHN P. MARQUAND



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*J*ACK RHYCE was well aware that in the counterespionage service the slightest false step or word can betray an agent to the enemy, and the price of an emotional entanglement can be death.

But when love walks on stage, who is ever prepared?—even when the stage is postwar Tokyo, where rival Intelligence services wage a deadly undercover war.

That extraordinary Japanese secret agent Mr. Moto returns to the scene in this fast-moving story of espionage and a heartbreaking conflict of loyalties.

Chapter 1

J

ACK RHYCE had not expected to see the Russians in San Francisco. The word in Washington had been that the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the United Nations would be over and that Mr. Molotov and his delegation would have left the city several hours before

Rhyce's arrival; but no one could have notified him of the change of plans without creating undue attention. The Russians were just leaving the Mark Hopkins Hotel when he arrived by taxi from the airport. There was hardly time for him to get his bags out before the driver was shooed away by a police escort.

"What's going on?" he asked the bellboy.

"It's the Russians," the bellboy said. "Mr. Molotov has been having a cocktail here with Secretary Dulles."

It would have looked conspicuous if he had moved backward. It was better to stand quietly and watch. The guards were grouping themselves around the leading limousine, heavy, stocky men with potatolike faces. He was sure two of them were officers high up in the secret police. He could only hope that the recognition was not mutual; not that there would have been any great harm in it. Nothing could have been more natural than that he should be in San Francisco at this particular time.

"The one with the glasses is Mr. Molotov," the bellboy said.

Jack Rhyce had not seen Mr. Molotov since they had once exchanged amenities over caviar and vodka, at the end of the war, when Jack had been traveling with one of the American missions.

"Young man," Mr. Molotov had said, "let us touch glasses in token of a lasting friendship between our two countries."

"This is a great honor, sir," Jack Rhyce had answered.

"No, no. You and I are both men."

"Yes, Excellency, and all men are brothers."

"You speak Russian not badly," Mr. Molotov had said.

Jack Rhyce instantly realized that by showing off his Russian he had called attention to himself. His chief had spoken to him very roughly about it afterward.

"Just get it through your head," the Chief had said, "that boys like you aren't supposed to be heard at all. Never try to be conspicuous. Never."

Mr. Molotov, beaming, waved to the crowd. Then the car door closed. The Russian party was gone. There was no way to discover whether any of them recognized him or not. He would have felt easier if he had not encountered them just when he was on the point of flying to Japan.

Twice during the war he had been to the Mark Hopkins Hotel, but only to ascend in the elevator to that popular cocktail room known as the Top of the Mark. He had been with the paratroopers, never dreaming that anyone would select him for what he was now doing, but even then his memory had been excellent. Consequently, he had the general layout of the hotel straight.

The Chief had once told him, Never chaffer long at a hotel reception desk, and as rapidly as possible get up to your room. He printed his name in block letters on the registration card.

"The name is Rhyce," he said. "John O. Rhyce, from Washington, D.C. I don't suppose you have any letters for me? Or telegrams or messages?" He spoke in a gentle, cultivated voice with an accent difficult to identify.

"No messages, Mr. Rhyce," the clerk said, "but we do have your reservation. Room 515."

It was a pleasant, airy room which looked toward the Bay. As soon as the bellboy left, Jack started on a routine tour of inspection. No transom; the door lock sound; no balconies or closely adjoining windows; no air shaft in the bathroom. It was five o'clock in the afternoon, ample time in which to make a final appraisal of his personal effects before dinner.

First he examined his passport. Unlike several others that he had carried, it told his true history except for his occupation—height five feet eleven, hair light brown, eyes blue, no distinguishing marks or features. His place of birth was Lincoln,

Nebraska, his date of birth was January 13, 1920. A good deal of thought had been given to his photograph, and the result was that it only vaguely resembled him. There was no disguising his high broad forehead, or the arch of his eyebrows, or the firmness of his jaw, but if he changed his expression he could repudiate the whole document.

Next, he turned to his brief case. The proper odds and ends and letters in a brief case could be of the utmost value. One never could be too careful with cover details.

The latest advices were that Japan was getting hot again and there was bound to be increased interest in any strange American. He expected and hoped that someone would go through his personal effects, and the sooner the better. The main point was to demonstrate early in the game that he was harmless, with nothing to conceal.

He placed the contents of his brief case on the writing table. The New Testament he had felt was too obvious by itself, and he had added a small volume of the sayings of Buddha. Both these volumes were well worn, with many cogent passages annotated in his own writing. He was satisfied with the way everything looked. The letters had been well handled; his fingerprints on them proved it. The letters indicating his family background gave him particular pleasure. One was from Omaha, Nebraska. Not only the words but the handwriting revealed the writer's character.

Dear, darling Bunny:

I am so pleased and proud that this wonderful chance has come to you after so many years of working so hard for other people. I know you don't know much about the Japanese, but we both know their hearts are in the right place. And your personality that inspires trust in everyone will get through to them, I know, in spite of all the barriers of race and creed. I would be worried about the Oriental women that you are going to meet over there if I did not have a mother's knowledge of a devoted son. Send me a post card every day, and happy landings.

Mumsie

After all, there could be little sinister about a mother's boy.

The second letter was written in a girlish hand on the stationery of the Department of Sociology of Goucher College.

Dear Jackie:

I'm going to miss you terribly. But seriously, sweetie, I think it's a grand thing that you are going away to new countries for a while, to study how other people live—not that I want you to get interested in any girls there. But seriously, sweetie, although I don't like to be a "bore," I think the time has come for you to make up your mind. This doesn't mean I don't love you dearly, but a girl can't wait all the time for any man, can she? And this has been going on ever since we met at your Senior Prom—remember? I know your mother is a darling, but honestly, I don't feel that she need interfere with a happy marriage. And so as you wing your way over the ocean, I hope . . .

Jack Rhyce did not read the rest of it, because he was familiar with the contents. The letter had been composed, though not handwritten, by an elderly spinster who specialized in cover work.

Then there were the letters of introduction to representatives of an institution known as the Asia Friendship League, which had branches in Japan and other countries. There was nothing wrong with this part of the cover. The organization had been conceived by public-spirited citizens and, at least in its Washington headquarters, had no employees with subversive records.

Connecting him with the Asia Friendship League had been the Chief's idea. The Chief had known the man who had given the money to form the League, a Texas oil millionaire named Gus Tremaine. Jack now had a letter on the League's letterhead:

ASIA FRIENDSHIP LEAGUE
NATIONAL HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON, D.C.

Dear Mr. Rhyce:

It is a real delight to hear from Mr. Gus Tremaine that he has commissioned you to make a survey of our work in the Orient, and to write a general report for him. You will find that in this show we have all our cards on the table and nothing up our sleeves. The main ideal behind our organization, endorsed by all the fine people whose names you see on the left margin of this letter, is, in one word—good will. A lot of people out in the Pacific area need a lot of help but not handouts that smack of colonialism. Our concept is simply to help folks to help themselves. And on your travels

you'll find out what a swell, alert team of truly dedicated folks we have in Tokyo, Seoul, Hong Kong and Saigon.

Looking forward to helping you in any way I can, in what I predict will be for you a real eye-opening adventure—

Cordially yours,
Chas. K. Harrington

This letter also interested Jack Rhyce. As soon as he had received it, he had asked to see the Chief.

"Well," the Chief said, "what's so funny about it?"

"I didn't say it sounded funny. I said I thought it sounded phony. This Friendship League setup sounds a little too good to be true."

"You say it sounds phony, but I'm afraid you think it's funny too. Please don't think it is, because I'd like to have you come back alive from Tokyo." The Chief looked hard at Jack and smiled in a frigid way. Jack understood that his briefing was about to start.

"Of course it sounds like a front organization," he said, "but as far as we can see, this one is harmless, although Bill Gibson has not reported on it yet. Anyway, Chas. K. Harrington is harmless, but he isn't funny. People like Harrington *aren't* funny. Please don't underrate them, Buster. They're usually narrow and dogmatic—but they have a certain idealism. Never underestimate the do-gooders. As a class, they've made us a lot of trouble in the last thirty years. You see, your cover is a do-gooder and you've got to understand the species. The thing to keep in mind is that this individual you're going to represent is a distinctly modern type. Do-goodism in its purest form is new in the world. Maybe it's our greatest hope, but it's also our biggest danger."

"You mean certain people and ideologies take advantage of it?"

"You're smart today, Buster," the Chief said. "Do-gooders are unrealistic. They don't think. They feel. The same used to be true of you, but I trust you're getting over it."

"How do you mean—it used to be true with me?" Jack asked.

"Do you remember," the Chief asked, "that damn-fool remark you made to Molotov about all men being brothers? I nearly sent you back to the Army after that. Here's another letter for you, Buster." He opened the top drawer of his desk and pulled out a photostat of a letter dated a week before from Amarillo, Texas.

Dear Mr. Harrington [he read]:

I've been kind of out of touch with our project, the Asia Friendship League, but I've heard a lot about the fine things you're doing out there, and I feel right gratified, to use a Texas phrase. Now just to keep myself up to date, I am commissioning a young friend of mine, for whom I can vouch in every way because we've rode the range together, to make a survey of everything you're doing.

The name is Jack Rhyce—a good American, by the way. Feel free to tell him anything, because, honestly, he's a prince. Here are a few facts. Jack graduated from Oberlin College in 1941. He has a fine religious background, but is at the same time a real he-man. He played right tackle for Oberlin and also commenced interesting himself in civic and welfare projects. During summer vacations, he was counselor for the YMCA boys' camp at Lincoln, Nebraska, and helped out in the organization of the Tiny Tim Football League. During the war he served in the paratroopers until wounded. After this he did desk work for various services in Washington, and since then has stayed in Government, traveling the world for Point Four and things like that.

I've been lucky enough to shanghai him out of Washington because Cupid has entered into the picture in the shape of a very lovely little trick who is working in the Department of Sociology at Goucher College, whose name is Helena Jacoby. What with his lovely mother, whom he's never let down, and this Cupid deal, Jack needs a little more dough.

Well, that's the story, Harrington. Give him the red-carpet treatment all the way and so, *hasta mañana*.

Gus Tremaine

The strength of the letter was that its main facts were provable. He had been to Oberlin. He had played right tackle. He had been a YMCA camp director, and his parents did entertain strong religious convictions. He had been a paratrooper until the Chief had run into him at Walter Reed Hospital. Since the war he had served in Washington.

"How do you like it?" the Chief asked. "It ought to be good, because I spent two nights over it, personally."

"It looks pretty good, sir," Jack said, "but it might help if you were to tell me just why you've selected me for this spot, and what I'm supposed to do when I get to Japan."

"Question Number One: You're going out to the East because you've never operated out there. Europeans, and especially Americans, stand out like sore thumbs in the East. Everybody knows your income and your girl friend. Even the rickshaw pullers know whether you are a spy or not. Orientals are experts about people, and that's why we are working so hard on your cover, but it won't help indefinitely. They find out everything eventually."

"What about Sorge?" Jack asked. "He lasted quite a while."

He was speaking of one of the greatest men in the profession—the German Sorge who, in the guise of a newspaper correspondent, ran the Russian spy ring, and for years had given Moscow accurate intelligence regarding Japan. He had been a foreigner in a highly suspicious country, he had been watched by a highly organized secret police, and yet it had been a long while before the Japanese caught up with him.

"Exactly. Sorge had a good cover. But the Japs got him in the end, and made him sing."

They were both silent for a few seconds.

"All right," the Chief said. "Question Number Two: You're going out to assist Gibson. He's got the wind up, and he doesn't scare easy. He thinks the Commies are planning a political assassination, and anti-American demonstrations in Tokyo. Gibson says a new personality is running things. An American, he thinks." The Chief's voice dropped to a lower note. "All we can do is to sketch this character. He's a new mind in the apparatus. There's been a sudden marked change in Japan, according to Gibson. There's more anti-Americanism, more pro-Communism. There's more and better Red literature in the bookshops. It's Gibson's notion that all this is the prelude to large-scale disturbances."

"It sounds like the usual Moscow technique," Jack Rhyce said.

"Actually, it's gayer. The atmosphere of the whole town is predominantly American. Maybe they think America is good because we won the war. You hardly see a kimono in Tokyo any more. Go to a ball game—and you might think you were back at home. The girls wear American dresses and the men are in business suits. They like everything American. That's the point. They don't fall for anything Russian. And this new propaganda has an American touch. It's damn clever, and it's dangerous. Frankly, I wouldn't say that Japan is very firmly in the camp of the freedom-loving nations, and Gibson thinks there's a hell of a

better chance of the country's going Communist now than there was six months ago."

"I hope you're going to tell me what's been dug up," Jack Rhyce said. "I have personal reasons for being curious."

"Oh, yes," the Chief said. "As far as we can make out, none of our people has seen this individual. However, there is reason to believe that he has been to Japan several times. We think his cover name is Ben Bushman. The man who is really masterminding things is Skirov, who comes to Tokyo to meet Ben. Gibson thinks there's a meeting due pretty soon."

Skirov had been on the Moscow first team for a long while.

"He's been improving in the last few years like rare old wine," the Chief said, "and he's slippery as an eel. Am I right in remembering that you've seen Skirov?"

"I'm sorry, sir, I missed him if he was at any of those parties in Moscow, but I have him clear in my mind. I've examined his photographs."

"I suppose it's too much to think you'll run into Skirov," the Chief said, "but if you should, don't forget the sky's the limit. There's just a hope that this new one—Big Ben—may lead you to him, but I doubt it. Skirov never sticks his neck out. That's why your main mission is Big Ben. I want him located and taped."

"There's no personal description of him yet, is there?"

"Nothing definite," the Chief said. "He may be big and it looks as though he were energetic, and therefore young. I'd say he was college-educated. He must have been in the East for a while, because our bet is that he has a smattering of Japanese. He must have a vigorous, engaging personality, be quite a ball of fire in fact. There's one thing that I'm pretty sure of. Big Ben has been in show business."

"What makes you go for that one, sir?" Jack asked.

"The Communist drama groups in Japan. You know how the Communists have always used drama to make their points. Now, according to Gibson, these productions have been jazzed up. Pretty girls are singing blues, there's soft-shoe and tap dancing, and American-type strippers."

"He sounds like someone in the Hollywood crowd."

"It could be. But for my money, Ben has been around the live stage. I rather think that he was in one of those musical-comedy road companies that travel around the country."

"What do we do if we find him?" Jack asked.

The Chief laughed, one of his rare laughs.

"You know my motto. Always do it with velvet gloves—when possible. I wouldn't want to hurt Big Ben if it isn't necessary, but we don't want a political assassination or anti-American demonstrations either. Bill Gibson will give you the line to take. Of course, if you run into Skirov that will change the picture. Also, if you stir things up, it may be that the whole Skirov apparatus will get ugly. I want you to take two weeks off at the Farm to study the material, and every afternoon you're to have a workout with the boys. Right through the whole curriculum."

"It isn't necessary," Jack said. "I know those things."

"It won't hurt to have a refresher course," the Chief said. "From now on you're a do-gooder. And do-gooders don't carry rods. I want you to be good if you have to rough it up with people. I'm most anxious for you to come back alive, Jack."

Chapter 2

ONE OF the troubles with working in the office was that you could have no life of your own because you knew too much, and the moment might arise when you forgot what was classified or what was not. You always had to appear to be normal; in no respect could you seem peculiar or conspicuous. Sometimes you hardly knew who you were, after months in foreign parts.

The Chief had once told Jack Rhyce that he had only one handicap: he was too good-looking. But for once his athletic build, his guileless face, and his irrepressible interest in everything were helpful to his cover. As he sat in his bedroom in the Mark Hopkins, checking over his brief case, he had almost forgotten who he was.

He examined the odds and ends that had seemingly fallen there by mistake—those bits that gave more veracity than any letters could, and all revealed character: the paper of matches from an inexpensive and very respectable hotel in midtown New York; theater-ticket stubs to a matinee; a memorandum of telephone numbers of persons to whom Chas. K. Harrington had referred him. He was examining these when his telephone rang.

There was no reason why the jangling of the bell should have

run through his nerves like an electric shock. It must have been that sight of the Russians, and also the fact that no one knew he was in San Francisco. He watched the telephone for a time without lifting it, but the bell continued ringing. Whoever was calling the room must have been very sure that he was there. He finally picked up the instrument. "Hello," he said.

He was startled when a girl's voice answered.

"Hello"—the voice had a slightly husky quality, and sounded young and seductive. "Is this Mr. John Rhyce?"

"Yes," he answered.

"Gosh, I'm glad I contacted you, Mr. Rhyce. I was afraid you might have left your room. This is Ruth—Ruth Bogart."

"Oh, yes"—he cudgeled his brains. He was good with names and faces; but he could not place Ruth Bogart.

"Don't you know who I am?" she asked.

"Why, no," he said, and he laughed. "I don't, to be quite frank, but then perhaps I'm not the Rhyce you're looking for. My name is spelled with a y."

"Oh, dear, didn't Mr. Harrington tell you? I'm one of the Asia League girls, and we're going on the same plane tomorrow."

"Why, no," he said. "Mr. Harrington didn't tell me."

"Oh, dear," she said. "Charlie is so absent-minded."

There was a slight pause while his mind moved rapidly. There were a number of possibilities in this call, and the most important one was that it might have originated with the Russians.

"Well, it's very kind of you to give me a ring," he said, "especially when you must have many acquaintances in the city, Miss Bogart."

"No," she said, "I haven't, and it's awfully lonely in a strange city, isn't it?" If it weren't for the implacable self-confidence of American women, he would have thought the approach was crude. "I'm stopping at the Mark, too, and Charles did suggest I call you. I was hoping if you weren't too busy we might have dinner. There's a place called Fisherman's Wharf, I understand, where they have divine sea food. My room is 312."

"Why, that sounds swell," Jack said. "I could certainly do with some sea food. I'll knock at 312 in just a jiffy."

It was much better to see what was going on than not. It was the oldest game in the world, to lure someone away so that his room could be searched, and a girl was conventionally the shill.

He very much hoped he was correct in this suspicion, because the sooner he was placed the better. The only doubt he harbored was how dumb he ought to be. Should he put his brief case in the upper drawer of the bureau, or should he leave it in sight? He tossed it carelessly on the bed, closed the room door noisily behind him.

One of the oldest tricks was also the ambush, the alluring call on the telephone, the welcoming inward opening of the door, and the blow on the base of the skull. A great deal of thought had been given at the Farm to the right way of entering a room. He rose to the balls of his feet, rapped briskly on the door of Room 312 with his left hand, his right low at his side, shoulders forward, knees bent, but only slightly.

"Oh," a voice said. "Just a moment, please."

He moved closer to the door and touched the knob with his left hand in order to be fully prepared when it turned. As the door opened inward, he moved with it. You had an opportunity to advance or retreat, as long as you were moving with the door. He entered the room almost on tiptoe, knees still bent. It was a duplicate of his own, and the bathroom door was closed. He had a glimpse of two matched suitcases. A girl stood by the door.

She was very pretty. He would have estimated her age at not over twenty-five. Her height was five feet six, hair dark brown, eyes gray green. Her face was longish with a mouth that showed character. She wore a dark dress of heavy silk, and she held a red leather handbag.

"Why, Mr. Rhyce," she smiled, "I didn't know you'd come rushing down quite so rapidly."

He smiled back in the overcordial manner that anyone might use when meeting an attractive girl. The color in her cheeks was natural, and she had only a touch of lipstick. He had grown adept, long ago, in spotting persons engaged in his line of work. There was something about them—an overalertness, or an impression of strain—but her personality baffled him.

"I guess I hurried down faster than was polite," he said, "because it was such a pleasure to hear a friendly voice. I'm surprised that Charlie didn't say anything about you, because, without wanting to be forward, I don't see how you could possibly skip anyone's mind."

"Why, Mr. Rhyce," she said, "what cute things you say."

Her looks, and the word *cute*, were like a tag in a museum case, although the possibility remained that she, too, had a cover.

"It is a real pleasure, making your acquaintance, Miss Bogart," Jack Rhyce said, "and it will be fun exploring San Francisco with you. I'm especially glad you mentioned Fisherman's Wharf, and after, that we might visit Chinatown."

"I think dinner would be lovely," she said, "but I'm afraid I'll have to beg off on Chinatown, although it sounds awfully romantic. I'm a little woozy, because I've just flown in from Chicago, and we have an early start tomorrow."

In the elevator she opened her red leather bag and took out a gold compact. She looked at herself critically in the little mirror. It was the correct technique for examining the elevator operator.

"Oh, I forgot to powder my nose," she said.

Her nose did not need powder, and he told her so.

"Well, anyway," she said, "this is a very exciting hotel. I had the good fortune to have a glimpse of Mr. Molotov this afternoon."

"Did you?" Jack Rhyce said heartily. "I had that good fortune, myself. I was just getting in from the airport."

"I thought he was cute," she said. "I was surprised. I thought he was just an old teddy bear, didn't you?"

"Well," Jack Rhyce said, "not exactly a teddy bear."

He kept wishing he could place her. The business with the compact mirror still disturbed him.

As he sat beside her in the taxi, she took out her compact again. Then she snapped her bag shut, and put her hand over his, where it rested on the seat. He was startled. "It is so romantic, isn't it," she said, "to see the sun setting over the Golden Gate?"

"Yes," he said. "It is going to be a lovely sunset."

Her fingers were pressing on the back of his hand, first long, and then short, the continental code.

Being followed, he read: *orange-and-black taxi*.

He was not disturbed by the news that she had given him. What did disturb him was his inability to place the girl.

Okay, he signaled back. *So what?*

Have message from Chief, she signaled back.

He drew his hand away. There were plenty of people in the outfit whom he did not know, since the cardinal principle in conducting such an operation was to have an individual know as few others as possible. He still could not be sure of her.

"Driver," he asked, "what is the best place for sea food at Fisherman's Wharf?"

"A lot of newcomers here sort of go for Fisherman's Grotto."

Jack Rhyce studied the back of the driver's head. He turned to the girl beside him. "Do you think we'd better try it?"

"I think it would be lovely," she said. "I always love to dine in new places. And we have so much to talk about."

"Yes," Jack said, "and I can't tell you how pleased I am that we will be traveling together."

"They hurried things up back East just so we could. Mr. Tremaine said I might as well go with you, since you've traveled so much. He's a lovely old man, isn't he? Just a regular teddy bear."

"I never thought of him in that category, exactly."

"You don't seem to think of anybody as teddy bears."

"Well, frankly, no, I haven't—not for a good many years," Jack Rhyce said. "And maybe it's just as well."

"Oh, dear, I hope you're not going to be a dim-view artist. I didn't think you would be, from what I heard at Goucher."

"Where?" he asked.

"Why, Goucher College, of course. Helena and I room together. In fact, frequently we're mistaken for each other."

"Now that you mention it," Jack Rhyce said, "I can see you look like Helena."

"I've heard so much about you," she said, "that I almost called you Jackie. What's the latest news of your mother?"

There was no time to answer because the taxi had stopped at Fisherman's Wharf. Jack Rhyce was out and beside the driver as quickly as he could manage it. An orange-and-black cab had stopped behind them, and a slender man in his sixties got out. It was close to sunset, but Fisherman's Wharf was well equipped with artificial illumination. It was not the sort of place to finger anyone. The elderly man from the cab lingered outside Fisherman's Grotto, examining some abalone shells. There was no immediate danger, Jack thought, but he would have felt safer if he had not met the Russians.

"Helena says you always call your mother 'Mumsie,'" the girl said, as they went into the restaurant.

"Oh, yes," he said, and he laughed in an embarrassed way. "It's a holdover from childhood."

He was reasonably sure by now that she was the girl at Goucher

College who had transcribed the "Dear Jackie" letter. Still, he needed to make a further check before he accepted her.

He smiled and nodded to the headwaiter. "I believe it's the season for Dungeness crabs," he said to her, "and if you've never tried one, they are a most rewarding experience."

Her smile was exaggeratedly gay and provocative; she was telling him that they should be absorbed in each other and oblivious to what went on around them. As he threw himself into the make-believe, it assumed the quality of a genuine boy-meets-girl scene. The bored look of the waiter as he handed him the menu proved that the audience believed.

The most harmless thing in the world, the Chief was accustomed to say in one of his lectures on cover, was a young couple falling in love. It was clear from the way she looked at him that she, too, could have heard that lecture. It was a problem to appear completely engrossed in her, and at the same time to examine the man two tables behind. He looked like a bank clerk of retirement age, and he made no apparent effort to hear what they were saying, showing that his job was only to keep them in sight.

"You can't blame me for being surprised when you called," Jack said. "No one gave me the least inkling that you'd be coming along." He laughed with embarrassment. "I hope this doesn't mean they're losing faith in me."

"Oh, no," she answered quickly, "it was only that it suddenly occurred to Mr. Tremaine that your job might be bigger than he thought, and that you might need some help."

"I'm very glad you're coming," he said.

"So am I, because I love to travel, and it's hard for a girl to travel alone. After I graduated I was with an insurance firm in London. I love London. I always feel at home when I can hear Big Ben."

Jack raised his wineglass. It reflected the old man two tables behind him.

"You know, I've been told you can hear Big Ben striking right in Tokyo, over the BBC—that is, when Radio Moscow doesn't interfere. I wonder if we'll hear Big Ben when we get to Tokyo."

"I think we will," she said, "almost right away."

She had told him almost everything. "I love to be in strange places and see strange people, don't you?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered. "I often play a little game with myself wondering who people are."

"You can't ever tell, can you? There's a little old man, all sort of worn and threadbare, behind you. He keeps looking at us, as if he were lonely. I wonder what he's been doing all his life."

Jack laughed as though she had said something highly amusing. "Whatever he's done, he's kept alive," he said.

"They say," she said, "that San Francisco is the gateway to the Orient. And it's true, isn't it? Because there's an Oriental here. I can't tell whether he's Chinese or Japanese."

"Where?" Jack asked, and his voice had an edge to it.

"Over there near that case with the queer fish on ice."

A young Japanese, whom he had not noticed, had entered Fisherman's Grotto.

"Oh," he said, "yes. I'd put him down for Japanese, and Nisei. It's funny, I didn't see him come in." It was safe, in his opinion, to discount the Japanese.

The old man behind them must have paid his check, because he rose as Jack signaled to the waiter, pausing, as he passed their table, to light a thin black cigar, and to glance at his wrist watch. The waiter arrived with their check just as the stranger went out the door. Jack had a bill ready.

"Thanks," he said, "and keep the change."

The lights were on outside and there was still daylight in the sky. Their shadow called a taxicab. "He was a dear old man, wasn't he?" Ruth Bogart said. "I wonder where he's going now."

"Home. He's finished work, I think," and he linked his arm through hers affectionately, partly from relief, and partly because of cover. "The whole thing was only a check on our baggage," he told her softly.

The shadow's glance at the watch confirmed the theory. They were to be watched for a time so that a warning could be given in case they returned too soon—and now the time was up.

"I think there's light enough," he said, "if you'd care to look at Alcatraz through the telescope."

"That would be lovely," she said, and then she giggled, "as long as we don't get any nearer."

"That's one place where we probably won't end up," he said. Then he put a coin in the slot for the telescope and added, "We can talk at the hotel. I think we're in the clear now."

"Why, it's fascinating," she said. "Hurry and take a look, before we have to spend another dime."

He had been careless, because he thought they were in the clear. When he heard a step behind him, he almost whirled around instead of turning slowly.

"Sir, I beg your pardon, but would you like to see Chinatown?"

It was the young Japanese from the restaurant.

"No, thanks," Jack said, "not tonight."

The Japanese, he saw, was in his early twenties. His neat, dark suit, his shirt open at the neck and his hair in a crew cut gave him the appearance of a college student.

"There are many interesting things to see in Chinatown."

"I know," Jack Rhyce said, "but not tonight, thanks."

He had not thought until then that there might be something wrong with the picture. The young man's hands were at his sides. There was no indication of

a forward motion, and nothing in the face, eyes, shoulders or set of the feet indicated trouble. Nevertheless, he did not move away.

"Excuse me, sir," he said. "Would you mind if I ask you another question?"

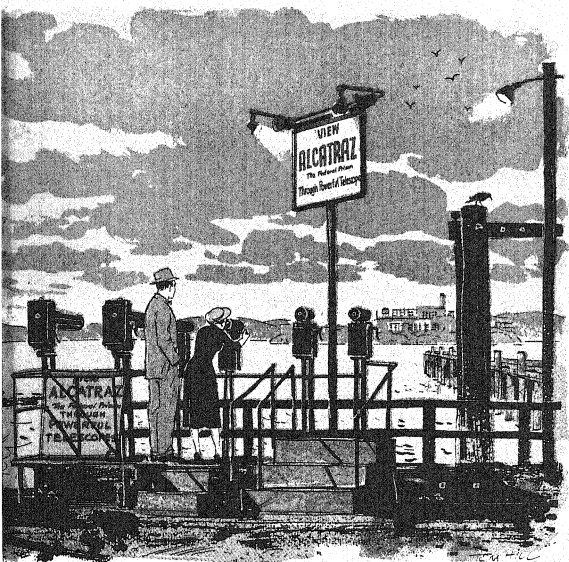
"Why, no, not at all. Go ahead and ask it, son."

After all, he was a do-gooder who liked kids.

"I was so near your table that I overheard some words you said to the lady. It was accident—I did not mean to be intrusive."

Jack laughed good-naturedly. He felt a slight tingling at the





base of his skull. "Why, that's all right, son," he said. "There's nothing I should mind having you overhear. What was it?"

"Well, you see, I'm Japanese, sir," he said.

"And I can see that you're American, too," Jack said heartily. "My guess is you were born right here in California."

"That is so, sir, and I'm a graduate of Cal. Tech."

"Well, well. Congratulations. That's a great school."

"I was interested in what you were saying," the boy said, "because I have relatives in Japan. May I introduce myself?"

My name is Nichi Naguchi. They called me Nick at college."

"Well, well," Jack said. "This is a real pleasure, Nick. My name's Jack Rhyce, and this is Miss Bogart."

It was hard to tell if the meeting was offbeat. After all, people were more breezy and friendly on the West Coast than the East.

"Well, don't hold back on us, Nick," Jack said. "What was it you heard us say that caught your attention?"

"Might I ask if you are going to Japan? You were saying you hoped to hear Big Ben strike in Tokyo, over the BBC."

The tingling at the base of Jack's skull grew more pronounced.

"Why, certainly," he said. "We're flying out tomorrow. Miss Bogart and I happen to be working for the Asia Friendship League."

He watched for some revealing sign, but the boy only looked reassured, and began to speak more eagerly.

"May I ask if you will need a guide when you get to Tokyo? The Japanese language is difficult for Americans sometimes." He laughed nervously. "I know a very good guide. My uncle. His English is very good. He is also fond of Americans, knows all about Japan—everything. He can answer all questions."

"That's quite a recommendation," Jack said, and he laughed. "Do you suppose he knows Big Ben?"

It was dangerous, but now and then you had to play a card.

"Big Ben?" the boy repeated.

Jack laughed again. "Didn't you get it, Nick? The clock that you heard us talking about, the one that strikes."

He could read nothing in the boy's face.

"Oh, yes," the boy said, "I forgot. If you would like, I can give you my uncle's address. I can write it on a card."

"Why, sure," Jack said. "I'll give him a buzz if I need him."

The boy handed the card to Jack. "Good-by, sir," he said, "and good-by, Miss Bogart, and good luck, and a very happy trip."

The wharf was more crowded now. No one seemed to take any interest in them, but it was safer, in case there was anybody who cared, to be happy about each other.

"Well," he said, "that was quite a little human experience, wasn't it?" He put the card in his wallet.

"Nichi Naguchi," she said. "They have funny names, don't they? It was cute of him, thinking of his uncle. Let's stroll around and look at the fishing boats before we go back to the hotel."

Undoubtedly she was as anxious to get back to the hotel as he, but it was never wise to hurry.

THE ELEVATOR boy who took them to the third floor only looked bored when Jack said, "I'll just see you to your door."

"It isn't really necessary, Jack," she said, "but it's sweet of you to think of it."

When she took her room key from her handbag, he snatched it from her playfully, and there was a merry little scuffle in the corridor, just in case anyone might be interested.

"Now really, Jack," she said, "now please try to behave."

When he turned the key in the door he approved of the way she covered him and watched the hall, and kept the correct distance behind him when he entered the darkened room. The second the door was closed behind them he pointed to the closed bathroom door. She opened it, turned on the light, and pulled open the closet door.

"Okay," she whispered. "Lord, I'm tired of being a Salvation Army lass!"

"Just a minute," he said gently, "before you get so frank. Would you mind writing a few words on the back of this envelope? I'll just take a look at your handbag while you're writing."

"You don't miss any tricks, do you?" she said.

"I try not to," he answered. "Hurry, please."

"What do you want me to write?" she asked.

"Anything. Write *I'll do my best to be a good coöperative girl if I go with you on this trip.*"

When she handed him back the envelope he read: *I don't like people who have to be so careful and, as I said, it has been a boring evening.* Her writing was the same as the Helena Jacoby letter in his brief case.

"I'm sorry," he said, "if you think I'm disagreeable, but I had to make up my mind about you. Let's check the luggage."

Her matched suitcases were lying one on top of the other, with a small brief case on top. She unzipped the brief case while he sat on the edge of the bed watching her. All of her gaucheness was gone. Even before she looked up and nodded, he knew that the baggage had been searched.

"It must have been a woman or a ribbon clerk," she whispered.

"They folded the nylons back beautifully."

"Brief-case contents?" he whispered.

"All through everything. They had it out all over the writing table."

"Careless of them," he said.

"Clever of me," she whispered, "for being dainty and using lots of dusting powder. See where they brushed it off?"

"Gloves," he said. "They dusted with them before they put them on."

"Smart as a whip, aren't you, Buster?" she said.

"You bet," he said. "What makes you call me Buster?"

"The Chief calls you that."

"Right," he said. "Now—what's the story?"

"Gibson asked for both of us. Skirov's coming over to meet Big Ben. It's definite."

They both stopped and listened. Someone was walking down the corridor with jaunty, heavy footsteps, and they heard a man's voice singing softly:

*"For every day is ladies' day with me.
I'm quite at their disposal all the while!"*

The song was from *The Red Mill*, the old Victor Herbert musical comedy that had been revived recently. They were both silent until the steps and the voice died away.

"Any identification of Big Ben?" he asked.

"Nothing new. The Chief still likes show business."

"Well," he whispered, "things don't look too bad for us, now they've gone through the bags."

"I know, but what about that Jap?"

"I'd like to get a check on him, but I think it wiser not to signal Washington. Don't you?"

They looked at each other, and nodded. From now on, any communication with the Bureau might ruin everything.

"I guess that's that," he said. "I wish I'd met you before I took on this cover. I hate to be such a pratfall all day long."

"Oh, well," she said, "it won't be as bad as all that. Breakfast downstairs at seven thirty, what? Good night, Buster."

"Good night," he said, and he put his hands on her shoulders. "Don't worry. We'll get through all right."

"I've given up worrying long ago," she said.

Chapter 3

BY THE time he and Ruth left Honolulu for Tokyo Jack Rhyce was positive that they were in the clear. After a number of years' experience, there was a sense of malaise when you were being watched. You could not put your finger on any one thing, but finally you could depend implicitly upon that feeling of imbalance. There had been none of that feeling in Honolulu. He felt that he was exactly what he was supposed to be, a muscular do-gooder, full of good will toward the world. The cover he had assumed had finally blended with his own personality.

The passengers on the plane were a Hawaiian-Japanese couple, a Dutch businessman, two British businessmen, and thirty members of a world-tour group. They all became congenial, flying across the Pacific at nineteen thousand feet. They began singing songs, and Jack Rhyce threw himself into the spirit of it. He had a good baritone. As far as he could remember later, Ruth and he broke away from cover only once. It was when the merriment had died down and he took the sayings of Buddha from his brief case.

"This fellow Buddha," he said, "is a little difficult, due to his antiquity and his foreign way of life, but a lot of it fits right in with today. Would you like me to read you a little of it, Ruth?"

"Oh, shut up," she said, "and let me go to sleep."

On the whole he could not blame her. They were silent for half an hour. "Jack," she said, "I'm sorry. When we set down at Wake, can't we get away for twenty minutes and be ourselves?"

"Why, yes," he said. "I think that would be a wonderful idea, but it will be dark at Wake—just before dawn."

"All right," she said, "in the dark then. In fact, it would look better. We're supposed to be in love, aren't we?"

"Yes," he said, "and you've been wonderful about it."

"Oh, shut up," she said again, "and let me go to sleep."

SHE WAS still asleep hours later when the plane was letting down. He put his hand on her arm to awaken her, and she gave a start and looked around as though she did not know where she was. He had experienced the same dangerous confusion more than once. "Wake Island," he said, "in about ten minutes."

"I was having a bad dream. I thought you were someone else."

"Just take it easy," he told her.

At Wake there was a change of crew, and passengers could go to the resthouse for early-morning refreshment. There was no checkup on anyone, and no reason at all why he and Ruth Bogart should not walk anywhere on that small island.

"Lord," she said, "it's lonely."

"Yes," he said, "it's lonely all right." But he was surprised that she should be impressed by it, because nothing was more lonely than the existence of anyone who was in the business.

They walked up a road, illuminated by dim electric lights, with ugly Nissen huts and Army shacks on either side. "We may as well take a look at the lagoon," he said. "It's getting light. That crowd in the plane—did you think any of them seemed offbeat?"

"I had some ideas about the thin Englishman, but I'll clear him now."

"He'll do," he said. "I think we're still in the clear."

"You're not worried about that Jap in San Francisco? You don't think he was trying to tell us something?"

"It doesn't seem to hold water. Let's forget him for now."

"I wish I could forget him and everything else. After a while you don't know what you are."

"I know what you mean. Maybe chameleons feel that way."

"We might have a nice time together, mightn't we," she said, "if we weren't all mixed up in this?"

"I'm not sure I would know how. I'm a chameleon now. I might turn green and yellow and not know I was doing it."

"How long have you been in?" she asked.

"Long enough to forget what it's like outside. About ten years."

"I'm newer than that."

"Yes," he said, "of course. What were you doing outside?"

"College, majoring in Romance languages. I met the Chief at a cocktail party in New York. Let's skip it, shall we?"

They walked for a while without speaking, through the moist hot dark. In a few minutes, there would be a glow of sunrise, and the colors of sand and sea would be unbelievably beautiful.

"It seems queer to me," he said, "that they haven't picked Big Ben out by now. I never knew anyone in show business who didn't try to push into the front row, and I never knew one who could keep his mouth shut for long."

He felt almost happy, walking with his partner. In the distance he could hear the noise of the island generating plant, and then he heard another sound. She must have heard it too, because she put her hand on his arm, and they both stood still.

"Someone singing," she said. "San Francisco. Remember?"

Of course he remembered the footsteps outside the hotel door, and that snatch of outmoded song. Now in the dark a man was singing another song from *The Red Mill*. His voice was excellent. It sounded carefree and full of the joy of living.

"... *In old New York!*" The words came incongruously through the darkness. "*The peach-crop's always fine!*"

They stood motionless on the road, listening. It was the kind of long shot that might possibly have a meaning.

"It comes from over by the lagoon," he told the girl. "Let's move over that way." The song continued as they walked.

*"They're sweet and fair and on the square!
The maids of Manhattan for mine!"*

There was light enough to see the lagoon, by now.

"From *The Red Mill*," Jack Rhyce said, in a loud and hearty voice. "It sounds like home, doesn't it? Do you remember the rest of it, dear? It goes like this: *You cannot see in gay Paree, in London or in Cork! The queens you'll meet on any street in old New York.*"

It seemed very natural when a voice called back: "Hey, let's do it again, whoever you are. *In old New York! In old New York . . .*"

A man in khaki swimming trunks was walking toward them. His yellow hair was dripping sea water, and he had a towel over his shoulder. He was very large—two inches taller than Jack, and a good twenty pounds heavier. He was beautifully built. He had heavy sandy eyebrows, greenish eyes, and a large mobile mouth.

There was occasionally a time when you could be sure of something, beyond any reasonable doubt. Such a moment of utter conviction was with Jack now. He felt his heart beat with a quick, savage triumph. It was one of those moments that made all the drudgery worth while. It was just as though someone were whispering in his ear, "There he is, there he is." As sure as fate, he was looking at Big Ben.

Even in that moment of revelation, he contrived to keep his balance. He found himself joining in the song without a quaver,

and he put his arm around Ruth. When he paused to catch his breath, the big man raised his hand like an orchestra leader.

"Now we're hitting it," he said. "Come on, let's give it the works. You take the lead, I'll follow."

"Well, it's nice to meet another Red Miller," Jack Rhyce answered, "especially on a rock like this. All right, here we go. Come on and join in, Ruth. *You cannot see in gay Paree . . .*"

He knew that he was talking to Big Ben, although he still had to prove it, and his main hope was that Big Ben did not have intuition, too. The man's size was impressive. In spite of all Jack had learned at the Farm, he was not sure how things would come out if they reached a showdown.

"Say, that was good," the big man said. As far as Jack Rhyce could see, his smile was friendly, and his eyes showed no suspicion. "You're not joining this flying installation here, are you?"

Jack laughed. "If you'll excuse my insulting such a lovely piece of real estate—thank goodness, no. We're just passengers out for a stroll, and heading west in about an hour."

"Oh," the big man said, "you mean Flight Five-zero-one."

"Yes, I think that's the number," Jack said. "Five-oh-one."

Even the clumsy use of numerals could help with cover. They were just tourists.

"That's too bad," the big man said. "I'd hoped you were on some crew so we could think up some more old songs. You've got to think up something when you lay off on this rock. Let's see. There's a world-tour group, isn't there, on Flight Five-zero-one? There was something about it, seems to me, at Operations."

His voice was gentle and lazy, with a drawl that might have belonged either to the Tidewater country or to the Southwest. But Jack was interested in more than the voice. Big Ben had overstepped. It was doubtful whether a world-tour group would be mentioned in Operations.

"That's right," Jack said, "but we don't happen to be in the party. Miss Bogart and I work for the Asia Friendship League."

"Well, it's too bad you're not staying on," the big man said, "because you both look like nice folks. We air-line folk get lonely. And now we're just ships that pass in the night."

"That's a very nice way of putting it," Jack said, "but it's a pleasure even to have made such a short acquaintance. I suppose we really ought to be getting back to that resthouse."

"Well, so long, folks," the big man said, "and don't let those Japs give you any wooden nickels."

"So long," Jack said, "and many happy landings."

They turned and walked back toward the airstrip. For a while he felt that the big man was watching them.

"Turn and wave to him," he said to Ruth.

"He's gone," she said. "Do you think he is the same man that was singing in the hall?"

"I think so."

"Do you think he knew that we were in that room?"

Jack sighed. You couldn't think of everything.

"That's a sixty-four-dollar question," he said, "but I shouldn't be surprised if we knew the answer someday."

No matter how you met a situation, it was impossible to do everything right. He did his best to follow the maxims of the business, one of which was to disturb nothing unless it was absolutely necessary. He had only a hunch to act on, yet, if his hunch was right, they had Big Ben. The man was an air-line employe at Wake Island, he was as safe as a book in the reference library. The question was: *Did their man know who they were?* If so it would be best to break out of cover at once and communicate with Washington. Afterward Jack could never convince himself that he had not moved properly at Wake, but doubts still plagued him even after the plane had taken off.

"I might go up forward and have a chat with the crew," he said, "in a purely social way."

"I wouldn't, if I were you, Jack," she told him. "It could get back to Wake that you were asking."

Of course she was perfectly right.

"Did you notice his hands? The way he kept his fingers half closed—they frightened me."

He did not tell her that he had been wondering what he could possibly do if Big Ben were to get him by the throat. "He looks very able," he said, "very first-class." He was thinking of the ease of motion which showed that mind and body moved contentedly together. "Well," he said, "let's wait until we see Gibson."

"WE ARE now approaching the coast of Japan," the steward said over the loud-speaker. "The sacred mountain of Fujiyama is visible off the left wing."

The Japanese were realists. Their representations of Fujiyama on textiles and on porcelains were exactly like that cinder-coned volcano. All the beauties and the difficulties of Japan were starkly obvious as one approached the coast by air. The sharp folds of the mountains showed why only a fifth of the land was suitable for agriculture. Jack could see the bright green of the rice paddies, the lighter green of bamboo and the darker shades of giant fir trees. The fishing boats off the coast added a last touch to the broad picture of the Japanese struggle for existence.

Japan's army was gone, and its navy, but not its national will to live. During the Occupation, the Japanese had displayed a disturbing absence of rancor, a good-natured acceptance of reality, almost a polite regret for any inconveniences they might have caused. They had been picking up the Tokyo wreckage, smiling cheerfully in the depth of their misfortunes. Now the new air terminal, shining with glass and plastics, was handsomer than any in New York.

The time, he saw, was quarter to twelve. Ruth's face looked drawn, which was not surprising: pursuing the sun across the Pacific was a tiring process. "We may as well get a taxi to the hotel," he said. "Nobody around here seems interested in us."

"I hope you're right," she said. "I don't want to go into an act right now. I'm tired."

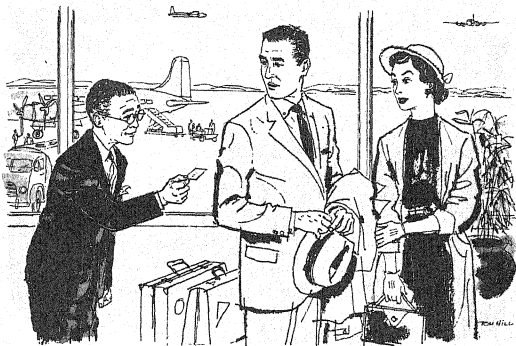
He wished that he was feeling more alert himself because it was hard to trust decisions made under the strain of fatigue. He noticed that the main concourse at the airport was not crowded, except for hotel and travel agents and friends of passengers who had come to meet the plane. The faces were Japanese, but the women were dressed in the same style that one might see in New York and the men wore neat dark business suits. Only a few generations, Jack was thinking, lay between the grotesque shadows of the double-sworded samurai, who had once roamed the streets of Tokyo as symbols of feudalism, and this entirely Western scene.

"Taxicab?" Jack said to a porter.

The porter shook his head. "All people go in big limousine."

"No, no," Jack answered. "The lady and me—taxicab."

He was so anxious to make his point that he was not aware that anyone had been watching until a small, middle-aged Japanese, dressed in a business suit of an unpleasant purplish-blue color and wearing very yellow tan shoes, stepped toward him.



"Excuse me, sir," he said. His hair was grayish and close-clipped, and he bowed in the manner of an older generation. "Do I speak to Mr. Rhyce?"

Jack wished that his mind were moving faster.

"Why, yes," he said, "I'm Mr. Rhyce."

The Japanese smiled, and Jack Rhyce saw that his upper incisor teeth were gold-covered. "May I introduce myself?" His voice was high, and slightly monotonous. He gave a nervous laugh, and his hands moved with astonishing rapidity as he snatched a wallet from inside his coat and whipped a card out of it.

"Why, thanks." The thing to do was to take the card slowly, to exhibit no alertness or suspicion. "*I. A. Moto*," he read aloud. "That name rings a bell somewhere. . . . Yes, I've got it." He pulled out his own wallet and produced the card he had been given at Fisherman's Wharf. "Your nephew gave me your name in San Francisco. Well, this is a real surprise." He turned to Ruth, smiling with fatuous enthusiasm. "You remember that nice Japanese boy who told us about his uncle who might show us around?"

"Why, yes," Ruth said. "He must have sent a cable. What a lovely thing to do."

"Yes," Mr. Moto said, "my nephew. He sent a cable."

"Well," Jack said. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Moto, and a mighty nice surprise, just when I was trying to tell the porter that I wanted a taxicab to take us to the Imperial Hotel."

"We can get a taxicab downstairs," Mr. Moto said. "This way, please."

"This is mighty kind of you," Jack said. "This young lady and I are pretty tired. If you could just get us a taxi and tell the driver Imperial Hotel—then suppose you come around at, say, six o'clock, and we can talk over what you can show us in Tokyo."

Mr. Moto looked delighted. "Thank you so very much. I will call at six o'clock."

Once in the taxi, Ruth said, "So this is Tokyo. I must say it isn't as romantic as I thought it was going to be."

She was right. Tokyo lay sprawling over a large area, divided by a muddy river and canals—a dusty, smoky city that sweltered in the summer and shivered in the winter. Except for the areas contiguous to the Imperial Palace, all districts were jumbled together like a deck of cards thrown on a table. He remembered a paragraph about Tokyo in a prewar guidebook. It was fortunate, the book had said, that most of the dwellings in Tokyo were of fragile frame construction, with paper windows, because they caught fire so easily, thus making better city planning possible when they were rebuilt. During the war the modern business district in the vicinity of the Palace was about all that had withstood the bombing, yet Tokyo was rebuilt in the same disorder as before, and with the same flimsiness. The shops were back again, wide open to the street, displaying dried fish, vegetables, bolts of cloth, earthen and enamel ware. You could buy anything from raw tuna fish to a whole gamut of Western-style goods in the great department stores along the Ginza.

Tokyo was itself again, but there were signs advertising American tooth paste and American cosmetics, and the streets were as full of motor traffic as any American city. Japanese and English cycles, motorbikes, pedicabs, small three-wheeled private cars, heavy-duty Japanese trucks, small shiny Japanese cars that competed with the German Volkswagen, American cars, French and English and Italian motors—everything, including rickshaws and hand-pushed barrows. But the Chief had been right. Where had the kimonos gone? And where were the wooden clogs called getas?

There was only a suspicion, among all that modernity, of something older, only an occasional, fleeting glimpse through a gateway of a dwarfed tree, or a pool or a rock garden. Nevertheless, most of old Japan still lay behind those perishable façades, and Jack Rhyce sensed a peculiar peace there. Once they had reached home, the Japanese women, in their New York cotton dresses and their high-heeled shoes, and the Japanese schoolgirls, in their navy-blue skirts and white middy blouses, and the men in their business suits would move magically into another kind of life.

The shoes would be left outside. There would be straw matting underfoot. European clothes would be hung away, and there would be kimonos. There would be cushions beside low tables, a charcoal brazier and tea, and *sushi* made of raw fish and rice, and a porcelain jar of hot sake surrounded by minute cups. The old conventions still lay just behind the modern curtain.

"You'll see the Imperial Palace grounds in just a minute," Jack said. "We're reaching the handsomest part of Tokyo now."

"You know so many interesting facts," she said. "I would have boned up on this, too, but I didn't know I was coming."

The Palace grounds of Japan's Emperor were guarded by a moat and behind it by a grim dry-masonry wall of black lava rock. The walls and moat were at least a thousand years old, and the etiquette and spiritual qualities that they protected were vastly older. A part of the Palace had been destroyed by bombs, but the Emperor was still residing among the trees and gardens. Across the street the skyscraper buildings of banks and insurance companies and the modern Nikatsu Hotel made a dramatic contrast.

They were driving up to the Imperial now, and he heard her exclaim when she saw that low structure of yellowish volcanic stone, with its strange windows and angles. It was a maze of terraces, loggias, turrets, inner gardens, glassed-in corridors and roof gardens. Although it was designed by an American, it must have once represented the quintessence of Japanese aspirations.

Chapter 4

HE COULD not tell whether he was surprised or relieved when he found that their rooms on the third floor had a connecting door. "You can take either room you like," he said. "I'd go to

sleep if I were you. Knock on the door if you want anything."

There was a Lilliputian quality about the rooms and everything inside them. His bathtub was too small. He had to bend his knees to reach the washbasin. He went through the wardrobe, looked behind the mirror and over every inch of the wall. He took off his coat and shoes and opened the door for a glance at the corridor, but there was no one there. On the whole he approved of the rooms. They looked over the fantastic porte-cochere and the driveway, thus affording a view of all the hotel traffic. The walls were thick, so that it would be possible to talk freely if voices were kept low, and all the locks were sound.

He knew the number he wanted, but he did not give it to the operator. "I want to speak to Mr. William Gibson," he said, and he spelled the name slowly, "at the Osaka Importing Company. Tell him Mr. John Rhyce is calling." He put down the telephone.

The sun of late June shone hot and strong on the lotus pool in front of the porte-cochere, and he stood at the small window looking at the pink and yellow lotus flowers while he waited for his call. He did not turn when he heard the door connecting the two rooms open, because he knew the sound of her step.

"Is everything all right in your place?" he asked.

"Everything's okay. So you knew this door was unlocked?"

"Yes," he said. "Gibson must have wanted it that way."

"Well, let's keep it open," she said. "Do you like the way things are going?"

"Not with that Jap meeting us at the plane. He looked to me as though he were in the business. When he reached into his pocket to take his wallet out, I almost thought he was going for a gun. You don't move that way without training."

"So you're feeling jumpy, too, are you?"

"It's the trip," he answered. "I'll feel clearer just as soon as I get a little shut-eye. I'm just contacting Gibson. They ought to call back any minute now. How about a drink?"

Just then the telephone rang. There was no mistaking Bill Gibson's voice. Jack went into his act again.

"Say, Bill," he said, "guess who this is? Jack Rhyce."

"Why, *Jack*," Bill answered. There was no one who could throw himself into a game better than Bill. "Where did you drop from, you old buzzard, and what are you doing in Tokyo?"

"I'm over here to write a report for the Asia Friendship League.

And who do you think I've got with me, to help out? Ruth Bogart. You remember Ruth, don't you? Why don't you drop everything, and come on up, Bill?"

"There's nothing I'd rather do in the world, but right at the minute things are pretty busy in the office."

"Oh, now Bill, can't you let things drop for just half an hour?"

"Oh, all right," Bill said. "You always did have a bad influence on me, Jack." His laugh had the proper tolerant affection, but his final remark struck Jack Rhyce as disconcerting. "Leave your door unlocked," he said.

Ruth Bogart was standing close beside Jack.

"Why did he ask you to leave the door unlocked?" she asked.

"I guess because he wants to get in in a hurry."

"Maybe I'm not going to have a nap after all."

"It could be possible, but how about that drink?" He pulled a flask from the bottom of his bag.

The worst thing in the world for anyone in the business was to develop any dependence on alcohol, but he was sure that the whiskey was good for them, under the circumstances. It was one of those few opportunities afforded them to be natural. They sat smiling at each other when they were not watching the door.

"Here's looking at you," she said. "Jack, are you carrying a gun?"

"Absolutely not. Are you?"

"I have one of those fountain pens in my handbag."

"Well, never mind it now," he said. "I suppose you've been told that you're a very pretty girl."

"I've been told, but I'm glad you mentioned it. And now may I make a remark about you, as long as we're being personal?"

"Why, yes," he said, "anything at all."

"I keep wondering what sort of a person you really are. I mean, what you're like when you're being yourself."

He felt depressed at her question.

"You know," he said, "I'm really beginning to forget what I used to be. That's the trouble with this business, isn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "I wish we could have met on the outside. Have you ever thought of getting out of all this? What would you do if you ever did?"

"I'd get a canoe and some canned goods and a tent. I'd paddle up through the lakes in Ontario until I got about a hundred miles

from anywhere, and then I'd pitch the tent. And when I wasn't asleep I'd sit in the sun, doing absolutely nothing—"

The door opened. His mind was jerked from northern Ontario, and he realized he never should have been thinking of it. He was not surprised at the manner in which Bill Gibson entered the room, having seen Bill move fast before, although he had never understood how it could be done with excess weight and a sagging waistline. Bill looked the part he had played for years in Tokyo—a middle-aged American businessman who drank too much before lunch, who fell asleep at the bridge table in the evening, who talked too much, and who had amorous proclivities which he could never suppress when he should. He was wearing a washable business suit. His jowls were heavy, his black hair was brushed back in a pompadour and he wore horn-rimmed spectacles.

"Hi," he said, and he nodded to Ruth. "Lock the door, kid. I'm sorry to barge in this way, but I've had a hunch for the last few days that I'm hot as a pistol, and I don't want to be seen." He sat down on the edge of the bed. "I'll have a drink," he said. "These rooms are all right to talk in. What's the emergency, Buster? I thought I was to call you, and not you me."

Jack Rhyce realized that he was being rebuked.

"That's right. I took the liberty, Bill. It's about Big Ben. I have a feeling we've seen him." He started with San Francisco and the steps outside the door, and the singing of the tune, and then the other tune at Wake. "When I heard that voice, it linked up with that song in the hall. It wouldn't have given me a jolt if it had not been from the same show."

Bill Gibson sipped his drink. "Well, describe him."

Jack complied. "He was damn big, and a beautiful build," he concluded. "I'd hate to tangle with him."

"How did he react?" Bill Gibson asked.

"Friendly. Maybe a little too friendly. He thought Ruth and I were new air-line personnel, and then he asked if we were passengers on a world cruise. He indicated he had read about the cruise group on Operations teletype. That's the one wrong move he made. My hunch would be that he picked it up in San Francisco the night he was singing 'Every Day Is Ladies' Day With Me.'"

"Ruth dear," Bill said, "would you look out the window in a nice careful way and see if there's an old beat-up Chevrolet out there? Dark-green coupe, left front fender pretty well mashed in,

dance that night and have a good time. My room will be in a cottage called Chrysanthemum Rest. It's near the ballroom. Around ten o'clock, leave the ballroom as if you were going out in the dark to smooch. There'll be so much noise and music, no one will hear us talking, or care. Have you got it?"

"This hotel," Jack said, "where is it, and how do I get there?"

"In Miyanoshita." Bill scribbled in his notebook, and tore out a page. "The Army used it during the Occupation. Officers and their wives spend the week-ends there, and young men and their girl friends. It's a comfortable and friendly place."

"Why don't you give us the whole fill-in now?" Jack said.

"There's not time. But I'll tell you this, it's dangerous as hell. They are planning a political assassination—"

He did not complete his sentence because Ruth said, "A Chevrolet with a dented fender is driving up."

"Let me know what whoever gets out looks like, but tell me later. Good luck. You've got everything?"

"Yes, Bill," Jack said. "We'll be seeing you."

He was gone so quietly that the closing of the door hardly made a sound.

"Only one man in the Chevrolet," Ruth said. "He's getting out. Thirty-five or six, sunglasses, brown hair, balding at temples. Height five feet ten. Weight maybe one seventy. Pale face, professorial type. Aloha shirt with goldfish on it. Trousers white silk. Shoes white buckskin trimmed with tan leather. He's entering the hotel. He seems American and harmless-looking."

"Right," Jack said. "You'd better go and lie down for a bit, Ruth." His hand firmly on her elbow, he gently propelled her into the other room.

"Hadn't we better talk things over? Bill looked upset."

"You take a nap first," he answered. "I'm afraid we're going to have a lot of time to talk things over."

She kicked off her shoes, and tossed herself inelegantly on the bed, indicating there was not much reason for reticence when you were in the business.

He believed that she was already asleep when he closed the door to the adjoining room, and he envied her. One of them must stay awake. The Chevrolet outside was disturbing. He was wondering whether it would be wise to stray down and take a closer look at it when someone knocked on the door.

The necessity for being alert again was difficult to face. He walked to the door and opened it with a few technical precautions. He was too tired for further shocks, but he had to face another. Standing outside in the narrow corridor was the man whom Ruth had described. There was no mistaking the shirt, the silk trousers, the white buckskin shoes trimmed with tan, the brown hair receding at the temples. He had the look which Jack had begun to associate with hundreds of individuals sent out by the Government to work on helpful projects—the eager and self-satisfied expression of someone who knew he knew the answers.

"Hello," the man said, and he had a warm, hail-fellow voice. "You're Mr. Rhyce, aren't you?"

Jack smiled. "The name is Rhyce. I'm just off the plane."

"Well, it's a real pleasure to welcome you to Tokyo," the man said. "My name's Harry Pender, running the shop here for Asia Friendship. Chas. Harrington wired you were coming in today. It's fine to have you aboard."

"Well, Harry Pender," Jack said, "this is mighty kind of you to look me up so promptly. I was on the point of taking a little snooze, but come on in. You've waked me up already."

It was true that Harry Pender had waked him up. Why had he not called on the house telephone? How long had he been out in the hall? If the Chevrolet with the battered fender had been following Bill Gibson, how *about* the Asia Friendship League? Jack Rhyce wished the Chief were there to know that it was not harmless.

"I won't take a minute of your time," Harry Pender said. "I should have met you at the airport, but we're going to have a conference of Japanese writers tomorrow, and I've been unusually busy as a consequence."

"You mustn't have me on your mind," Jack said. "I'm just to look things over and do this report. I'd like to sit in on that writers' conference with you."

Mr. Pender nodded. "The whole place is open to you. Nothing up our sleeves or anything like that." He laughed heartily. "And I don't know any way in which you can get the spirit of what we're up to here more than by sitting in at the table with some of our Japanese writers. They're lovable people, the Japanese."

"How do you mean—lovable?" Jack Rhyce asked.

"You'll get their spirit, given time. They're basically only a bunch of mixed-up kids, but lovable at heart. You'll see."

Jack Rhyce nodded in a respectful, sympathetic manner.

"I suppose I'm prejudiced in my point of view about the Japanese," he said. "I was in the Pacific during the war."

"I know the superb record that you made with the paratroopers in Burma. I wish I might have been with you, but I had to serve in a more sheltered branch—the USO—due to being in the Four F category."

"Oh," Jack Rhyce said, "so you were in the USO?"

He could have kicked himself the moment he had said it. The USO and Big Ben might come together somewhere and he never should have betrayed interest. He thought there was a sharpening in Mr. Pender's brown eyes.

"It used to hurt at times," Mr. Pender said, "not to be able to be up forward with you boys, but we did our best in our small way. I was in a singing troupe. We called our group the Song Caravan, and they were a fine dedicated bunch." His glance traveled about the room with a casualness which could have been overelaborate. "Oh, by the way, the young lady who was coming over to assist you—is there anything I can do for her? What is her name? It's gone out of my head."

"Ruth Bogart," Jack said. "She's asleep, I think."

"Bring her over to the office tomorrow. The more the merrier." He held out his hand. His muscle tone was excellent. "Well, so long. Half past nine tomorrow? You have the address?"

"Oh, yes," Jack said, "and thanks for dropping in."

After Mr. Pender had left, he stood by his window watching the parked Chevrolet. In two and a half minutes Mr. Pender had reached it—approximately the time it should have taken him to walk down the staircases, across the lobby and out the front door.

Jack turned from the window and very gently opened the door of Ruth's room. She was wide awake. "I'm sorry if we've kept you awake," he said. "It was the man in the Aloha shirt."

She smiled at him. "You didn't keep me awake. I went down and took a look at the car."

"That was a very good girl, provided you got away with it."

"I think I did. I'm pretty good with cars. There was nothing except a gun in the glove compartment. A Beretta, all loaded."

It was interesting that anyone in Mr. Pender's position should have been carrying an Italian officer's pistol.

"And now," she said, "go away and let me sleep, and you'd

and the door missing a handle." Gibson sipped his drink. "So he's on a plane crew?"

Jack nodded. "And I'll bet he's only a few hours out of here right now," he said.

"There isn't any Chevrolet outside yet," Ruth said.

"Well, thanks, sweetie," Bill Gibson said. "Keep on looking, will you? That Chevvy's been like Mary's little lamb to me the last few days. . . . Did you check up on him at Wake?"

"No, it was a big temptation, but it might have been a giveaway."

"Maybe you've got something, Buster," Bill said. "It's the first good lead on him I've seen for quite a while."

Sometimes it was hard for Jack to realize that Bill's mind and techniques were among the best in the office. His face looked bloated and his eyes rheumy and dull, but he was not missing anything as Jack told about the encounter with the Russians, about the old bank clerk at the table, and about the Japanese who mentioned Big Ben. "Cripes, Jack," he said, "this thing is closing in."

"And that isn't all. There was this other one at the airport."

"Let's see his card." Bill held out his hand. "Moto isn't a Japanese name," he said. "It's only a suffix to a name, like Yamamoto, or Mikimoto, who puts pearls in the oysters—and maybe there'll be some Mikimoto pearls for you, Ruth dear, if you happen to see that Chevrolet." He finished his drink. "Well, kids, it looks as if we're going to get some action. Would you guess this Moto boy was in touch with Wake?"

"The thought has crossed my mind, Bill," Jack said.

"This has been very interesting, kids, because it ties up with some other stuff that's just come in. Big Ben is around, all right. I've a lot of things to do, and I can't brief you now. We've got to get together somewhere. Now here's what I want—"

He stood up. It was amazing how quickly he could pull himself off the bed, fat abdomen, jowls and everything. "I want you two to take tomorrow to get your cover sweetened with this Asia Friendship League. I also want you to make fools of yourselves about each other. The day after tomorrow, you're going to a resort hotel in the mountains. It's a real off-the-record honeymoon retreat, and no one will notice you if you just keep interested in each other. I'll be up there Saturday night. You'll see me at the bar at six o'clock, but don't pay any attention to me. Go to the

better, too. I think things are going to be quiet for a while."

It was exasperating to discover the desire for sleep had left him. He stretched out on his bed and tried to relax. He was full of the old malaise that told him that a net was closing. The elderly man in the San Francisco restaurant and the Nisei Japanese boy were parts of it, and so was the middle-aged Japanese named Moto. Pender was another strand of the net, and there was the fact that Bill Gibson was on the run. The net was closing on Bill, but it might be, Jack thought, that he and Ruth were still out of it. He was almost positive that Mr. Pender had accepted them.

Mr. Moto was due to call at six and until six there was nothing to do but rest. Then he realized he had forgotten something, and he pushed open the adjoining door. Ruth was asleep. The tenseness about her mouth had relaxed. She had a half-cheerful, half-expectant look. She was a very pretty girl now that she was asleep, the way she would have looked on the outside, and he was sure that her dreams had taken her there. He was sorry to bring her back into the business. "Sorry," he said. "Just one thing, Ruth."

You could tell that she had been at the Farm from the way she awakened. Her right hand moved toward her handbag.

"This Moto who's calling at six," he said. "I think he'll ring the house telephone and not barge up like Pender. The bell will wake you. Get up and listen, and keep that fountain pen handy. It might just be we'll have to use it."

"I'd have covered you anyway. Now go relax or you'll be fidgety when he comes, and leave the door open. I need company."

He could not sleep when he lay down. The truth had begun to dawn on him that his old resilience and iron were wearing thin. The girl's face that looked so young and happy in sleep had disturbed him. He began thinking, just when he should not have, of the outside. If he had stayed on the outside he would undoubtedly be married by now. He would have had a home and children, and he would have been a decent man—warmhearted and genuine—not a suspicious, machine-tooled robot who had been through too much, a man who had played under so many covers that it was becoming impossible to guess what he could have been.

There had always been people like himself who could not adjust to civil life after the violences of war. There had been some wonderful moments and triumphs, of course, and the satisfaction of knowing that in ten years he had made a place for himself in a

highly exacting profession. But in the end, what was there of real value? Very little, and little of which to be proud. He was a spy, or a secret agent, if you cared for a politer word, trained to be a sneak, and if necessary a betrayer; trained to run from danger and let his best friend get it, if it helped the business; to kill or be killed inconspicuously; to die with his mouth shut, in the dark. There was only one loyalty—loyalty to the business.

He raised himself on his elbow. The whiskey flask was in his bag and the glasses were on the table. He could see the traces of Ruth Bogart's lipstick on her glass. She should have been more careful. Drinking was dangerous in the business—it was far safer to indulge in bitter thoughts.

The telephone awakened him. He had slept heavily, something that should never happen in the field. He heard Ruth close the adjoining door. "Hello," he said. "Jack Rhyce speaking."

The time on his wrist watch was six to the dot. He was feeling hungry, and also rested. He was on the beam again.

"Please." It was Mr. Moto. "I hope I did not awaken you."

"Oh, it's you, is it?" Jack Rhyce said. "Do I sound sleepy?"

"Just a little in your voice, Mr. Rhyce."

The man downstairs was a smart Jap, and it was hard to find anything smarter. "Well, as a matter of fact," Jack said, "I have been having a little shut-eye. But come on right up."

There was time to tie his shoes, and put on his seersucker coat. Then his heart gave a startled jump. He had forgotten the three glasses on the table, but as he moved toward them he saw that only two were there, one with lipstick smears. Ruth must have been in when he was asleep, and he felt ashamed. He should have thought of the two glasses himself—one of them with lipstick.

The tap on the door was gentle and discreet. He felt a species of nervousness. He knew too much about Japan, yet he must not show it. Japanese were sensitive.

"Well, well," he said, "step right in. You're on the dot, I see."

Mr. Moto's features were finely chiseled. His hands were slender and graceful. In native dress, he would have been a fine figure of a samurai, and it was possible that his family had held that feudal rank. But the hideous purplish-blue business suit ruined this romantic picture, and so did the light-tan shoes. Mr. Moto was a figure of low comedy. Then a startling idea came to Jack: that he and Mr. Moto might both be impersonating clumsy people. The

hissing intake of Mr. Moto's breath was too loud and too comic.

"So nice of you to receive me," Mr. Moto said. "You have enjoyed your sleep, I hope."

"Yes, sir," Jack Rhyce said. "I had a real nice shut-eye and I feel the better for it, Mr.—excuse me. I forget your name."

"Moto," Mr. Moto said. He laughed politely.

"I hope you'll excuse it, Mr. Moto. Japanese names are tough for me. And I suppose Rhyce is hard for you."

"Oh, no. *R* is easy in Japan. We have trouble when we pronounce your letter *rell*. See—I cannot say it."

It was hard for Jack Rhyce to decide whether or not Mr. Moto was having deliberate trouble with his *l*'s.

"It takes all kinds to make a world, doesn't it?" Jack said. "You know, I'm kind of hungry after that plane ride. I wonder if we could get some bacon and eggs and tea. Maybe you can make the room boy understand in Japanese better than I can in English."

"Oh, yes. I shall call room service. Everything is up to date at the Imperiar Hote-ru. Excuse me when I cannot say the *l*."

Mr. Moto had slipped, and Jack was sure that he was unaware of it. He had pronounced the letter *l*. When he picked up the telephone and asked for room service in Japanese, his accent was crisp and educated. His posture was very good, showing that he had done his tour of military duty. When he gave the order, he asked for bacon and eggs and coffee—not tea.

"Everything will be right up," Mr. Moto said. "Chop-chop, as they say in China. Ha-ha."

"That's mighty kind of you," Jack said. "Sit down, won't you please? And I hope the food comes up chop-chop. I could certainly do with a cup of coffee."

He could have bitten off his tongue the moment he mentioned coffee, but there was nothing to do but go ahead, without showing embarrassment. "You've come at just the right time, Mr. Moto," he said. "I'm here to do a report for the Asia Friendship League. I'll need somebody like you to show me around."

Mr. Moto's glance had turned toward the glasses on the table; Jack had a feeling that tension had relaxed when he saw them. You could discount a good deal of potential menace in a man if you saw a glass with lipstick smears in his bedroom.

"The Asia Friendship League is known to me," Mr. Moto said, "and Mr. Pender, its new head, is such a good man."

"So you know Mr. Pender? I've had a talk with him: he's going to show me around the shop tomorrow, but Saturday and Sunday I shall need a little rest and relaxation. You know—all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." He smiled fatuously.

"There are lots of amusements in Tokyo," Mr. Moto said. "I would be so happy to show geisha girls or anything, Mr. Rhyce."

"That would be swell sometime later, but this Saturday and Sunday I was thinking of taking a spin into the country. I've heard about a hotel up in the mountains. In Mio—Mio—"

"Oh," Mr. Moto said, "Miyanoshita. Very nice."

Jack Rhyce gave Mr. Moto a man-to-man look.

"I thought if you could rent me a good car and a driver, I might go there and, well—you know, take a girl along."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Moto said. "I can drive. I can get a good car for you, and very nice girl."

"That's the spirit. I had a hunch when I saw you at the airport that you'd be broad-minded. You supply the car, and I'll supply the young lady. Be here at nine o'clock on Saturday morning."

"Oh, yes," Mr. Moto said, "and we can see Kamakura, the Daibutsu Buddha—many other things."

There was a knock on the door. It was a waiter with bacon and eggs and coffee. Mr. Moto rose and bowed. "Nine, Saturday," he said. "Big, fine American car. You will be satisfied, I am sure, and thank you very much, Mr. Rhyce."

It had been a long while since Jack Rhyce had been so unsure of his cover work. That slip of his worried him. His expression must have disturbed Ruth when he called her to come in.

"What's bothering you?" she asked.

"The coffee," he answered, and he told her.

"Well, it's over now," she said. "I didn't know you knew a word of Japanese. I thought you'd never been in Japan."

"Frankly," he said, "I did live in Japan for a time as a kid. Japanese servants are devoted to kids, and I was speaking the language all the time. My father was a missionary."

"Why didn't you lose your Japanese when you went back home?"

"My father wanted me to keep it up," he said. "You see—don't laugh—he wanted me to be a missionary, too. My fluency came back to me during the war, at language school." He stopped. "By the way, thanks for doing that about the glasses."

"Don't mention it," she said. "You can't be a mastermind all the time, you know. Did he notice?"

"Oh, yes, he noticed. I'm afraid he's very smart. I don't know where he fits in—not to mention this man Pender in the Chevrolet." As Jack told her about Harry Pender the outlines of her face hardened. Her eyes were still very pretty, but they hardened, too.

"We're still in the clear with Pender, I think," Jack said, "or I think he wouldn't have told about that USO singing caravan. But we're running into something."

"Yes," she said, "but let's not take it too big."

"Just what do you mean?" he asked.

"We're teamed up on this, and you're running the show, of course," she said. "I like the way you work, but one thing about you makes me nervous. You try to think of everything, and no one can. Why not try to think of one or two things tonight, and put the rest out of your head?"

"All right," he said. "Name the one or two things."

"I'll name one. How about thinking about me for a while?" When she smiled at him his nerves were not on edge any longer.

"I mean," she said, "let's try to be friends. I think it would help the cover if we found out a little more about each other. Aren't you curious about me? Guess what I was outside."

He was surprised, because girls in the business seldom cared to talk about their pasts. It was a safe bet they all had them or they would not have been in the business. He honestly preferred to take her as she was, without knowing any more.

"Why, yes," he said, "I could make an educated guess about you, but I don't know that you'd like it."

"You're such a pro, aren't you? You know everything."

He was sorry to detect an undertone of antagonism in what she said. It was better, when working with a woman, to keep things on an impersonal basis, and not to quarrel; but the strain of the day had told on him, too. "I'm sorry if I've displeased you," he said. "Of course I don't know everything, but I've been acquainted with a lot of girls in the business. I've often had to check their backgrounds. I've made a guess about you already."

Her face flushed. "So you think I'm just another tramp."

"No. There's no cause to lose your temper, Ruth."

"I'm not losing my temper," she answered. "Tell me what you think you know about me, and I'll tell you if you're right."

"All right, if you want the professor to give you an analysis—in the first place, you're not in the tramp class, and you never will be. You have too much background and character."

"That's nice to know," she answered. "Go ahead, what else?"

"Most girls in your position," he said, "tell the same story. All of them are born of wealthy parents, then along came a business failure, or an undesirable marriage. The undesirable marriage is usually correct—but in your case the rest of it is true. You come from an excellent background. You were brought up in a large American city, but I can't tell you which, from your accent."

"Go ahead," she said. "What else?"

"You also spent a lot of your time, while you were growing up, in the country. You schooled and jumped horses once."

"What made you make that guess?" she asked.

"Your posture, but mainly your hands. You have beautiful hands. They are riding hands."

"All right," she said. "You hit that one. Go ahead."

"I'd guess that you're an only child. You went to college, and I'll bet it was nearer to Bryn Mawr than Goucher. You fell in love, and the boy friend left you flat."

"What makes you say that?" she asked.

"From the way you act with a man. You don't trust men. Then you met the Chief. He found that you were a natural at the business. You were rattling around loose, and that's about all."

"Just how did you happen to see my file?" she asked. "I thought those things were confidential."

"No file," he said. "I've just been watching you."

She was looking at him with a new respect. Suddenly she smiled, and he knew they were friends. "You make me feel naked," she said. "We owned a place in Virginia. In fact, I own it still."

"Now, listen, you don't have to tell me anything. It's dangerous."

"You're always careful, aren't you?" she said in an exasperated way. "How do you mean—dangerous?"

"When you get talking this way you get interested. It's dangerous to get interested in anyone in the business, Ruth. You might have to ditch me, or I might have to ditch you, tomorrow."

His hand rested on her shoulder, and she had not moved away, and he was right that it was dangerous. He knew all the rules about women and emotional involvement. He knew that he was coming very close to breaking several of them, but he had never

realized that the prospect could be so pleasant. He felt he was himself again, exactly as he had been on the outside. Caution was gone when he looked at her.

Chapter 5

A GREAT deal of the business was very dull, but that ensuing Friday was one of the most irksome that Jack Rhyce could remember. To fall into the mood of the dedicated people in the Friendship office, and still not miss a trick, demanded every bit of his patience.

It was a time to be very, very careful. It was a time to be naive and to convey emphatically the utter harmlessness of himself and Ruth Bogart. It was also a time to show a picture of their growing attachment.

The Asia Friendship League occupied half the floor of a post-war office building in the neighborhood of the Ginza. Mr. Pender had a truly beautiful office, furnished with new Japanese furniture that had been adapted to the European fashion. The furniture had been designed right in the Friendship League; a lot of leading Japanese artists and merchants had been consulted, Mr. Pender explained. This was just a small example of what the Asia Friendship League was up to. There was a group in the office studying the new Japanese films. Then there was the sports group. And this afternoon there would be a panel discussion on writing.

Then there was Harry Pender's pet project, the Friendly Pen Pals. Jack's interest quickened.

"It's an idea of my own," Harry said, "and I hope you'll play it up big in your report, Jack. It just came over me—why not get Japanese kids in school and the universities to swap ideas and news with their own age groups back home, and set up a translation post right here in the League? It would be exactly the cultural interchange we're looking for."

Jack Rhyce nodded slowly. He was wondering how he had overlooked Harry Pender in his research back in the States and he could not see how the Chief had overlooked him either. Pen Pals could form the basis of an excellent message center.

It was late in the afternoon when he picked up another piece of information that interested him.

"You see," Harry was saying, "this job is a real challenge to me, Jack. I was running our settlement house at Pnompenh not six weeks ago—and along came the news that the League board had selected me for Tokyo. It's a big jump."

"Pnompenh," Jack Rhyce said slowly. "I don't think I've ever heard of Pnompenh."

"I don't blame you," Harry Pender said. "It's in Cambodia, and not many people get there now."

It was also an excellent place from which to communicate with China. Jack glanced at his wrist watch.

"This has been a very fascinating day, Harry," he said. "But now maybe Ruth and I had better call things off until Monday, or else we'll lose perspective. We can get a taxi, can't we?"

"Oh, don't do that," Harry said. "Why don't we all go to a real Japanese restaurant for supper, and see the night life?"

Jack shook his head. "Let's make it sometime next week. I think Ruth's still tired from the trip. Aren't you, Ruth?"

"Well, yes," she said. "I am a little, Jack."

"I'll just take her for a walk along the Ginza."

"Well—" Mr. Pender smiled broadly "—have fun, kids, but come back to school on Monday."

The heat on the street outside made them catch their breath.

"I noticed quite a lot today," Ruth said. "We'd better be careful."

"That's why we're walking down the Ginza," he said. "If anyone's tailing us . . . I agree, we'll have to be damn careful."

EVERY LARGE city in the world was bound to have a characteristic street or square, and it seemed to Jack Rhyce that the Ginza was the most vital of them all; it best expressed the spirit of the people who had made it. It was not a beautiful street, any more than Broadway was beautiful. It was tawdry, but gay. There were huge department stores, and smaller shops filled with garish Japanese goods. There were motion-picture houses displaying the latest Hollywood films as well as Japanese-made pictures. There were beer halls, cabarets and billboards, jewelry and cultured pearls. The Ginza was a reflection of the indomitable spirit of a people anxious to be in the front rank of what was perhaps erroneously known as progress. The startling vigor of Japan was reflected in the burgeoning of manufactured goods, from plastic

toys to electric refrigerators. And where was Japan going to sell this glittering output? This was one of the world's new, restive questions.

"I wouldn't say we had a tail on us, would you?" Ruth said after a while.

"No. Between us we should have spotted one by now."

"Then let's go back to the hotel and have a drink in the bar. You can make eyes at me in front of the bar boys just to build the cover, darling—just to build the cover."

"We'll go there pretty soon," he said, "but there's one place I'd like to take you first. From what I've heard about it, I think perhaps we can pick up some ideas there."

Along the Ginza it was simple enough to find a taxi driver who could speak a little English.

"Street with all the bookstores," Jack said.

"For heaven's sake, why bookstores?" she said.

"I want to see," he said, "what people are reading in Japan."

The book district in Tokyo extended for block after block. The wide-open doorways leading to the brightly lighted interiors displayed stacks of new paper-backed editions, translations from all over the world, and the classical literature of Japan. Most of the bookstores were filled with customers. No one interrupted Ruth or Jack as they moved from shop to shop. The displays of periodicals were what interested him most, particularly the large numbers that dealt with Russia and Red China. These were crude but effective projections of American formats. Except for some scurrilous pictures of Uncle Sam and heavily armed gentlemen with dollar signs on their waistcoats who whipped starving workers into factories, everyone was happy in the pictures. Fat Chinese peasants were smilingly learning to read. Soldiers carrying the Freedom Flag of the Hammer and Sickle gave candy to children.

"You see," he said, "how it rounds out the picture?"

"Yes," she said, taking his arm and pressing it urgently. "But we shouldn't have come here. Buy some cheap American magazine and let's get out."

"We're in the clear," he said as they stood on the curb waving to a taxi. "There was nothing queer in any of those shops."

"We were. We were the only foreigners and everyone remembers foreigners. Where would you keep a lookout for new operators? Put yourself in their position, Jack."



He felt mortified that he had not thought of her point himself. Too many small mistakes added up to something fatal.

"There are some people looking at us," she said.

"But, darling," he said, and he laughed loudly. Then he put his arm through hers. At least he could leave the impression of dalliance if anyone was watching. "Honey," he said, "I'll get you a nice cool drink in that nice cool bar. Frankly, I can't wait."

The bar of the Imperial Hotel was aggressively modern and so over-air-conditioned that Jack felt for a moment that they were inside a refrigerator. Nearly all the tables were filled, mostly with rather weary-looking Europeans. There was nothing professional about anyone there, nothing technically disturbing. It was becoming easier and easier to appear conspicuously interested in Ruth Bogart.

"What would you like, sweet?" he asked.

"Scotch on the rocks, darling," she said.

They gazed at each other fatuously, and then they began to laugh, and it was the first time in several weeks that he had been genuinely amused. He was happy, and happiness was such a rare sensation that he was suspicious of it, but it made the whole day worth while.

"You know," he said, "I think you're a pretty clever girl. In fact, maybe you are smarter than I am. You were right about those bookstores."

"I like to have you wrong sometimes," she said. "It shows that maybe you are human."

"Believe me, it's better not to be."

She smiled at him, ironically, but very pleasantly.

"You remind me of a poem of Whittier's," she said, "about the boy and the girl at the schoolhouse. *'I'm sorry that I spelt the word: I hate to go above you, Because,'—the brown eyes lower fell—'Because, you see, I love you!'*"

"Yes," he said, "but I don't like what comes later. *Dear girl! the grasses on her grave Have forty years been growing.*"

"I don't like that either," she said, "and I wish you hadn't brought it up."

But even so, nothing changed his mood.

"You know," he said, "I don't see why we shouldn't have a nice time going there tomorrow."

"Please," she said, "please let's, Jack."

JACK RHYCE stood beneath the porte-cochere of the Imperial Hotel. Mr. Moto had done very well with the car. It was a vintage Buick limousine, with the chauffeur's seat separated by glass from the owner's.

"Thirty thousand yen for week-end," Mr. Moto said. "Me, automobile, and glass for privacy. It is not too expensive, I hope."

"Oh, no," Jack Rhyce said, "not for this once."

There was one good thing about the business. Money was never an obstacle, and nobody audited expense accounts if you happened to get home. "All right," he said, "let's go." The mood of the afternoon before was still with him, and he felt no sensation of tenseness or discomfort.

Jack Rhyce knew that he would never forget the motor ride to Miyanoshita. It was one of those periods of unalloyed beauty. It was dangerous to feel as he was beginning to about the girl beside him, but as he looked back over that long day he could not experience a single qualm of regret. There was nothing that he or she could have done until they made contact with Bill Gibson at the hotel that night. Besides, all they did was part of the cover.

It was part of the cover to be conscious of her nearness and to hope that the car would soon take another curve so that she would lean against him. The way a draft of air blew a wisp of hair across her forehead was beautiful, and so was the austere perfection of her profile when softened by a smile, and so were the quick gestures of her strong but delicate hands.

"It's just as though we were on the outside," he said.

"Yes," she answered, "and please let's keep it that way." And she did not move away when he took her hand.

EXCEPT FOR the heavy traffic on the roads, the disruptions of the machine age were gone once they reached the country. The thatched farmhouses, the jade green of the rice plants reflected in the shallow water of the checkerboard squares of the paddies, the bamboo windbreaks, the farmers in their huge straw hats meticulously tending each rice shoot, the jagged mountains in the background were part of an eternal picture of a way of life that could survive all change.

There was a fortuneteller who had his concession on the path leading to one of the shrines at Kamakura, an emaciated elderly man who smiled and beckoned to Jack and Ruth. On a stand near

him was a miniature temple with three small black-and-yellow birds perched in front of it. The fortuneteller whipped from his pocket a typewritten explanation.

"Give any bird a fifty-yen folded note," Jack read. "Bird will drop it in the cashbox, fly to temple door, ring bell, enter temple, get fortune on folded paper and bring back same."

"It might be worth fifty yen," Jack said.

"Yes," she said, "but let me pay for it. I want it to be my fortune." She handed the old man a folded note. He held it in front of one of the birds, and the bird took it in its beak and dropped it in a tiny money chest.

"Come on, Joe," the old man chanted, "come on, Joe."

That act of fortunetelling must have dated back to temple necromancy, but the words were new, telling their tale of lonely American soldiers on leave, back at home now, or dead perhaps in Korea.

The tiny black-and-yellow bird cocked its head and its beady eye was remarkably intelligent. It fluttered from its perch to tiny steps that led to the temple porch. It pushed a small bell smartly with its beak, and the bell tinkled. Then the bird disappeared inside the temple and emerged carrying a folded bit of paper. It fluttered back to its perch, and Ruth took the paper from its beak.

"Don't be afraid to read it," Jack said. "They're bound to have only good fortunes here."

She glanced at the words and handed it to him.

"Once you were unhappy," he read, "but you are happy now."

"That's true, you know," she said. "Absolutely true. And you're happy too, aren't you? I mean for just now?"

"Oh, yes," he said. "I'm happy."

"There's only one catch," she said. "It says I'm happy now but it doesn't say how long, and I want it to be long-term. Would you like it long-term?"

"Yes," he said. "You couldn't possibly know how much I want it that way."

They both knew that the moment would be transient, but a weight was lifted from him. He felt a grateful relief that he was alive. Then he heard a footstep behind them and he was back from the outside to the inside, turning slowly and accurately on his heel.

He did not know that Mr. Moto had followed them until then, nor was there any way of telling how long Mr. Moto had been



behind them or what he might have heard. There was nothing harder, Jack Rhyce was thinking, than to tread softly on a graveled walk, and only that single footstep had attracted his attention.

"Oh, hello," he said. "Have we been staying here too long?"

"No," Mr. Moto said, "but there is still a great distance to go."

"All right," Jack said. He put a slight edge to his words because he wanted to make it clear that he had not approved of that gentle approach. "Go on back to the car. We'll be with you in a minute."

"You're right about his being in the business," Ruth said when

Mr. Moto moved away. "Do you think he knows what we are?"

"Let's not worry right now," he said. "We'll know better when we see Bill tonight. Let's still try to be happy."

There were long cool shadows across the road as they began to climb into the hills. They would be at the hotel at about six.

Jack had heard there were hot springs at the hotel, and a swimming pool. The rooms were comfortable, he told her, and the food and service very good. "But I'd rather stay at a Japanese inn," he said. "I'll take you to one sometime."

"I'd like it," she said, but he knew she was thinking of something else. "Jack, will you promise me something?"

"Promise what?" he asked.

"If we get out of this, let's try to live on the outside. And promise me you'll get out of the business if I don't come back."

"Have you got a hunch about something, Ruth?"

"No," she said, "no. But I'd like to have you promise, Jack."

"Let's talk about it later, but I'm glad you like me that much."

"Yes, I like you that much," she said.

Chapter 6

THE TOWN was on a slope of the winding road that led to the sacred Mount Fuji. The hot springs and the scenery had made it a resort for a great many years, patronized by the old nobility and wealthy people from Tokyo. The hotel had been designed as a concession to European tastes, long before the war; time, plus the imagination of its proprietors, had given it an exotic Eurasian charm. Its grounds on the mountain slope were watered by rills from natural springs that made a merry sound of running water. The hotel gardens were very beautiful. The Japanese had ancient ways with plants and flowers which were different from those of other gardeners. Everything, even if seemingly wild, was actually in order, even down to the arrangements of wind- and water-worn rocks.

The hotel had been designed as a place for a happy holiday. Built on the side of a hill, it had a profusion of halls, staircases, outside galleries and connection ells that had English names with an Oriental lilt—Plum Blossom Cottage, Cozy Nook, Peach Bloom.

The day was still warm but the air was cooler than it had been in Tokyo. Mr. Moto was speaking authoritatively to the Japanese concierge, and Jack was contented to hear him say that his passengers were good people who would appreciate attention.

"I will take the car," Mr. Moto said, "but I will call later for orders and to see if all is right."

"You don't have to until tomorrow," Jack told him. "It's been a very fine day, and thanks a lot."

There was plenty of time before dark to stroll about the grounds and to locate the cottage called Chrysanthemum Rest, where Bill Gibson would be staying.

Ruth and he followed the boy and their bags, passing through an arcade lined with display cases of silks, lacquer, ivories and porcelains. As they climbed a flight of stairs to the upper level of the hotel, he realized that, in spite of years of practice in many places, the ground plan of this rambling building was too much for him, and he greatly disliked the sensation of not being oriented.

When the boy opened the door to a spacious double bedroom, Jack encountered in himself an embarrassment that made him very formal. He gave a liberal tip and spoke enthusiastically as the boy backed out, bowing.

"This is a nice room, isn't it, dear?" he asked. "I think I'd better take the bed by the doorway, don't you?" It did not help his uneasiness to find that she was laughing at him. "And if you want to bathe or anything," he said, "I'll go out and stroll around."

"For heaven's sake," she said, "don't take it so seriously, even if your father was a missionary. I'm going to take a bath. Do you snore, darling?"

"You ought to know I don't; not in this business, Ruth."

"The more we forget the business while we're here, the better," she said. "Darling, aren't you going to give me a kiss?"

She raised her voice when she asked that question.

"I've been waiting for this for hours," he said.

"Oh, darling," she said, and then she whispered, "There's someone in the hall outside. We have the privacy of goldfish in this room."

His first instinct was to tiptoe to the door and snatch it open, but she held him and shook her head. "No, no," she whispered, "maybe it isn't anything, but I think this place is spooky, Jack."

She was right about the room. There was a transom above the

door and he especially disliked transoms. Two windows at the foot of the twin beds looked over the carefully tended grounds at the rear of the hotel. The third window, a ground-glass one in the bathroom, opened on the corridor, and a sound of footsteps made a rhythmic beat along the corridor's jute carpet.

"I seem to be losing my grip," he said, "what with one thing or another."

It was a mistake, he realized, to have said such a thing. He believed in holding a positive thought; as soon as one became worried and overanxious, accidents occurred. He stepped to the open windows, examined the shades and curtains and then made a thorough inventory of the bedroom. The Japanese prints on the wall seemed surprisingly good; the curtains were of heavy cotton, green and yellow with a bamboo motif. Whoever had decorated the room had good taste. But there was one disturbing feature. The lock on the door was an old contraption which any trained operator could pick in a matter of seconds.

Ruth turned on the bathtub taps and the running water made a cheerful sound.

"I suppose we'll have to look nice but informal," she said, "if we're going to that dance." She was taking out clothing from her neatly packed bag. "I'll wear my light-green silk."

"Better put on the dark green or a dark blue if you have it," he told her. "Remember, we are going outside the hotel."

"Right. I forgot. I wonder whether Gibson's here yet."

"That's his problem," he told her. "I'm going out to walk around while you take your bath."

"You don't have to, you know," she said.

She was hanging things in the closet as though they were going to stay for an indefinite period. The voices of the hotel guests came gaily through the open windows. Then in the distance someone began whistling a tune that made Jack look at Ruth Bogart. Their faces assumed the old watchful look. Jack hummed, along with the whistling, "*You cannot see in gay Paree, in London or in Cork! The queens you'll meet on any street in old New York!*"

"Well, well," he said softly, "our old favorite, isn't it?"

"It's no favorite of mine," she said. "I told you this place was spooky."

"Well," he said, "go ahead and take your bath. I'd better go down there and see what I can see."

She shook her head. "I'm not going to stay here alone. I'll go right down with you. Frankly, that song frightens me."

They walked arm in arm up the hill past the swimming pool and tennis courts, almost deserted now. They wandered heedlessly past Chrysanthemum Rest—a small cottage, not much more than a hundred and fifty feet from the ballroom ell. Bill Gibson could not have picked a better place for a private conversation because, as he had said, the noise of the orchestra would drown out anything else. Then they stopped at the fish pond and watched children feeding bread crumbs to the giant goldfish.

"You know," she said, "I wouldn't mind being a fish myself, right now. No wonder they live a hundred years."

"Don't wish that, sweet," he said, loudly enough so that everyone could hear. "Just compromise and be a mermaid."

"All right, if you say so," she answered, "you old sea dog, you."

"Just don't overplay," he whispered to her amorously.

"All right," she said, and she laughed.

There was reassurance in her laughter; it meant that, like him, she had noticed nothing out of the ordinary.

"Let's go to the Main Bar," he said. "There may be something new there."

THE MAIN BAR was on the hotel's lower level. Its decoration derived from foreign influence close to the turn of the century. Its comfortable chairs and tables were not crowded too closely together. A dozen happy couples were at the tables in small groups, and several unaccompanied men were seated at the bar.

He beckoned to a waiter. "Gin and tonic, dear?"

They had selected a table in a far corner from which the whole room was visible.

"Scotch and water," she answered. "Everybody here looks very cool and comfortable, and I can't locate any types."

"Don't try too hard. Don't forget we're in love." He leaned back and sipped his drink. If it had not been for that tune, he would have believed that the place was wholly antiseptic.

"That's right," she said. "I've got to keep remembering. You look handsomer than you did yesterday, but I'd like it if you could get your seersucker suit pressed."

"It makes me look informal, feeble and good-natured," he told her. "Nobody cares what happens to a man in a seersucker suit."

"I care," she said. "Oh, Jack! Look across the room."

His glance followed hers to the entrance by the bar. Bill Gibson had entered the room, and there was no mistaking what he was—a tired, middle-aged American exporter from Tokyo out for a good time over the week-end. He sauntered in an aimless way about the room, just as a lonely man with a few drinks would. He walked close by the table where Jack and Ruth Bogart sat, and for a second Jack thought he might be giving some sort of signal, but nothing in Bill's expression changed as he passed the table. He ambled to the bar, and hoisted himself on one of the stools, calling happily: "Scotch and soda, and make it a double, boy-san."

"Listen," Ruth said, "school's out now, isn't it? Can't we please go up and get a bath?"

"You go ahead," Jack said. "Maybe I ought to stick around here for a few minutes."

"No. All those corridors . . . I won't go up there alone."

"Now, listen. I don't think there's a cough in a carload here." And then he checked himself, and his voice dropped to a whisper. "Fasten your seat belt, and for heaven's sake, let's be natural."

She was a good girl, back in the act again. She had glanced for a fraction of a second at the doorway to the bar, long enough to see what he had seen. There was no mistaking the sandy hair, the clear-eyed glance, the lazily swinging arms, and the characteristic half bend of the fingers of the man who had just entered. Big Ben was wearing khaki trousers and an Aloha shirt.

"You look awfully sweet tonight, honey," Jack said.

He saw Bill Gibson at the bar tossing off his double Scotch and soda. Bill had the description and he never missed anything. He and Jack Rhyce must have shared the same consternation, and also the same exalted sense you had when the game was getting hot—because anything might happen now.

As Big Ben stood by the door, Jack saw that he had recognized them. He could feel it in the nerves of his neck. Honest pleasure rippled over Big Ben's face, and he waved to them.

Jack beckoned, at the same time lifting his glass. "Darling," he said loudly, "look who's coming over! Ships that pass in the night!"

Big Ben sauntered toward them. Jack did not like to think that the physical sensation he experienced was one of fear; it was rather a state of intense watchfulness that set all his perceptions at concert pitch. He pushed back his chair and stood up, smiling.

"Well, hello, troops," Big Ben said.

"Why, hello yourself," Jack Rhyce said. "If it isn't our sweet singer from Wake. Remember, Ruth?"

"I certainly do remember." Ruth smiled invitingly. "It was so terribly romantic, and you had such a lovely voice."

"Gee, thanks," Big Ben said. "It was quite a surprise to me to hear the boy friend answer right back from nowhere."

"Take a chair and take the weight off your feet," Jack said. "We certainly owe you a drink. It ought to be a double for a boy as big as you."

"You're not such a peewee yourself, fella." Big Ben smiled. "I'll bet you played football in your time."

"Well, you win, Mr. Holmes, I played right tackle for Oberlin. Where did you play?"

"Oh, shucks," Big Ben said. "I was never in the big time like that. I played for a jerkwater Southern Baptist college." His words trailed off apologetically, and then he gave his order to the waiter.

Jack had never watched or listened more carefully, but he could detect no flaw. He and Ruth were accepted for what they appeared to be. He was so sure of this that he had to fight down a sense of elation.

"Seriously," he said, "this is a real pleasure, meeting you. I suppose we ought to introduce ourselves. My name's Jack Rhyce, and this is Ruth Bogart. I think we told you we're out here to make a survey for the Asia Friendship League."

"Say, it's a pleasure to meet you two nice people again. My name's Ben Bushman. Flight engineer, at the present time. Our crew lays over at Tokyo about ten days out of every month, and Bushman comes up here for relaxation." He chuckled. "Just the way Jack Rhyce and Ruth Bogart have come up to study Asia Friendship. Am I right, or am I right?"

"Well, now, I don't exactly know how to answer that one," Jack said. He laughed self-consciously, and so did Ruth.

"But you must admit it is a friendly place here, Mr. Bushman," she said, and smiled at him dazzlingly.

"Now, now, honey," Big Ben said. "You call me Ben, and just remember, any time if two isn't company and three isn't a crowd, look around for me, will you? We might sing some old songs."

"Why, that will be splendid, Ben," Ruth said. "Jack loves old

songs, too. But if he gets preachy or tiresome, I'll know where to turn, and two will still be company, won't it?"

"Oh, now, Ruth," Jack said. He wished that her flirtatiousness did not sound so genuine. "I'm not as bad as all that, am I? But she's right, Ben. I do like a song fest sometimes."

"Maybe we can have one tonight," Big Ben said. "Just drop into the bar later, say, eleven—that is, if you haven't something better to do." He slapped Jack affectionately on the shoulder and stood up. "See you later, I hope. And now I've got to be gittin'."

Jack drew a deep breath as he watched Big Ben leave. The man's walk was the loose-jointed, perfectly coordinated gait of the highly proficient athlete. He sauntered past the bar, shoulders squared and arms swinging easily. Bill Gibson had surely seen him now. Things were moving so fast that everything at any moment might pour itself into a barrel and go over Niagara Falls.

"It was all so natural, wasn't it?" Ruth said, and her words echoed what Jack had been thinking.

That conversation with Big Ben had been interwoven with threads of truth. Football at Oberlin, song fests because both of them honestly loved to sing, and even his growing interest in Ruth Bogart had all contributed to honesty. That bit about the smalltime Southern Baptist college must have been true; its hidden tones had been touching in their frankness. There must have been some sort of social frustration there, similar to what everyone faced in adolescence and to which most people learned to adjust, but which Big Ben could not handle yet. There was a quality in his voice and gait that told its own story.

He felt her hand on his arm. "Darling, you've got to talk to me," she said. "What have you been thinking about, Jack?"

"You ought to know. About You-Know-Who, and you needn't have given him such a big glad eye."

They were leaning toward each other, ostensibly absorbed in each other's words, and they had waited long enough in the bar. Jack signaled to a waiter, and paid the check.

They were just another happy couple as they walked hand in hand to their room in the ell called Cozy Nook.

"You know, darling," he told her, "I was just thinking of another one of those *Red Mill* songs."

"Oh, sing it now, dear," she said, "softly, just for me."

He drew her closer to him.

*"Not that you are fair, dear,
Not that you are true,
Not your golden hair, dear,
Not your eyes of blue . . ."*

He stopped and laughed. "It doesn't fit, does it? Your hair is dark, dear, and your eyes are grayish green."

"Never mind," she said. "I approve of the general scheme. Go ahead and finish it."

*"When we ask the reason,
Words are all too few!
So I know I love you, dear,
Because you're you."*

"I wish to goodness," she said, and her voice had a catch in it, "that I could be me again."

They had reached their room, and he was pulling the clumsy key from his pocket. "Why, say," he said in a bemused tone, "it's unlocked. I thought I'd locked it. Didn't you think I had, honey?"

"Yes, I kind of thought so." And then she giggled. "But I did have other things on my mind."

"I'm losing my memory in my old age," he said.

They laughed like college freshmen. Then they opened the door, using the standard Farm precautions.

Mr. Moto was standing in the center of the room. Jack was not entirely surprised, but he hoped that he acted surprised. "How the hell did you get in here?" he asked, assuming the badgering tone of an honest American dealing with a wily Oriental.

"So sorry," Mr. Moto said. His hands shook with artificial agitation. "The door was unlocked. So sorry."

The door had not been unlocked, and it was a safe assumption that Mr. Moto knew he knew it. The only solution was to raise one's voice a hectoring octave higher. "So what?" Jack Rhyce said. "Does that mean you should walk inside?"

"Excuse, but the door was wide open. More better, I thought, to wait for your return. Then things would not be stolen."

"That's funny," Jack said in a more reasonable tone. "I thought I'd locked that door. Anyway, you had your handbag with you, didn't you, sweet?"

"Yes," Ruth said. "I think it was very thoughtful of Mr. Moto to wait for us."

Mr. Moto was becoming an annoyingly loose end to the problem.

"Of course I'm grateful to him too, sweet," Jack said. "I was only sort of startled, seeing him here. Excuse it, Mr. Moto. What did you want to see me for?"

Mr. Moto bobbed his head and rubbed his hands together.

"First, may I ask you if all is right here, and proper?"

"Everything is swell, thanks," Jack answered.

"And your wishes for tomorrow?" Mr. Moto asked. "Might I suggest a picnic and a ride toward the base of Mount Fuji?"

If it wasn't one problem, it was another. He should have rented a car and driven it himself, but now his mobility was controlled by the Japanese in front of him.

"I tell you what," he said. "You be waiting outside at seven o'clock in the morning, then we'll decide what we want to do." He smiled at Mr. Moto. "Forgive anything I said about your being in the room. I'll see the door's locked next time."

He stood close to the door listening to the sound of Mr. Moto's footsteps retreating down the hall. Ruth made a quick check of the suitcases. She shook her head as a signal that nothing had been disturbed. He moved to the window and drew the curtains.

"Turn on the water in the tub," he whispered.

"Oh, Jack," she called as she turned the water on, "hasn't it been a wonderful day, darling?"

She moved close to him and rested her head on his shoulder, and he was glad to put his arms around her. He had seldom felt so grateful for companionship.

"It's really started now," she said.

"Yes," he said, "it's moving. What do you know about Skirov?"

"Skirov . . ." she repeated vaguely.

"The Russian who's running the Communist show here. The Chief briefed you on him, didn't he?"

"Oh, yes. I was thinking about the Jap and the big goon down in the bar. I saw Skirov in Vienna once."

"Then you can tell me if I have his description straight. Middle forties, five feet five, one hundred twelve, thin, agile, delicate hands and feet, Mongoloid features."

"Yes," she said, "that's he."

"All right, what about Moto? Is he Skirov playing a Jap?"

It had been one of those swift inspirations which he had learned to suspect, but if he were right they might be able to end the show that night, because they would have worked out the whole scheme of the apparatus. He had never been so desperately anxious to end a mission, not so much because of himself as because of her.

Her forehead was wrinkled and she gazed straight ahead. He was aware of her nearness and her beauty, which annoyed him because his mind should have been concentrated on abstractions. Finally she looked up at him.

"I guess I was wrong in thinking that big handsome boys like you are dumb. I like your thought. I wish I could buy it."

"Maybe it's more reasonable than it sounds," he said. "They looked us over in San Francisco. They think we're absolutely pure. Then what could be better than using us as a cover? Skirov and Big Ben want to meet. What's better than having Skirov as a Japanese chauffeur? That explains his being in the room—just to make a final check."

"It's too easy, darling. Life isn't made that way."

Her criticism confirmed his own inner dread. She was right. Nothing ever came easy in the business.

"Besides, Jack," she said, "he simply isn't Skirov."

"You don't know Japs as well as I do," he answered. "This one's like something on the stage."

"Perhaps he's trying to hide his rank or education, but he isn't Skirov."

"Well, if he isn't," Jack Rhyce asked, "who is he?"

"He's in the business, all right, but he isn't Moscow-trained. That Moscow school sticks out all over them. Skirov is a Moscow boy. Now unzip my dress, will you? I'm going to have that bath, but I'll leave the door open, if you have any more ideas."

He had a number of ideas as he sat in an easy chair near the window and listened to her splashing in the tub, but he had learned long ago that it was folly to spread ideas around. He was already getting the structure of the story so clearly that a question of policy was beginning to arise. Should the apparatus be smashed, or should it be left alone in the hope of locating Skirov? Bill Gibson would make the decision.

He wished that he did not have to see Bill that night. The

dangers of the meeting had measurably increased with Big Ben on the scene. However, the importance of an immediate meeting had increased correspondingly.

"Jack," she called, "I thought you were going to tell me some new ideas."

"You know that's bad technique," he said.

"Yes," she said, "I know." She was out of the bathroom, brushing her hair with brisk, almost savage strokes. She was wearing an oldish cotton print robe.

"I'll buy you a kimono tomorrow," he said. "You'd look well in a kimono, green and blue."

"Thanks," she said. "I'm sorry about the thing I have on."

He began taking things from his suitcase, putting his brushes and toilet articles on the tall dresser, laying his blue suit carefully over the foot of the bed and his black shoes with their composition soles on the floor beneath it. Both he and she were neat as pins, as you were bound to be in the business.

"I was thinking about Big Ben," he said. "From the way he looked at you I think you could take him."

"Yes, I know I can," she answered.

"It makes me mad, but maybe it would be a good thing for tonight. I want Ben's mind off things for about an hour. He mustn't worry where I am, and only be glad I'm not where he is. You do it and I'll see Gibson." Her face grew stiff and wooden. "Are you afraid of him, Ruth?" he asked gently.

"No, but I hated the way he looked at me, and you'd have to be mighty convincing with a man like that."

It was what she was there for, and they both knew it, but he felt his face redden. "I didn't mean anything serious," he said. "Just a walk, or a ride up the mountain in his car."

She smiled. "It's nice to know you're human occasionally. I'm glad the proposition doesn't appeal to you personally, but I don't think it would be a good one, anyway. Don't you see it would tell him right away that there was something wrong with us? It would look better if I simply let him know he was attractive to me—and made him want to get me away from you."

She moved closer to him and put her hands on his shoulders.

"Now listen," he said. "I'm ashamed I made that proposition, but it was business, Ruth."

Her grip on his shoulders tightened. "Just get it through your

head that I want to stay with you tonight. I don't want to see you get a knife in your back," she said.

"It's going to be harder for two to get up to Gibson's cottage."

"Jack," she said, and she moved closer to him, "I'm frightened. Ben scares me, on your account more than mine. But I promise I won't let you down."

He bent over and kissed her. Even as he did so he knew that he was being very foolish. "All right," he said, "put on a dark dress, and let's go down to dinner."

Chapter 7

THERE WERE a great many couples on the hotel dance floor at shortly before ten o'clock that night, following the uninspired rhythms of the Japanese orchestra, which did its best to follow the American tradition.

She was a light and beautiful dancer, much better than he, but they were both of them good enough to be disturbingly outstanding. "Don't do anything fancy," he told her. "Just dance in a mediocre way. You're too good-looking as it is."

"That's what I thought about you when I saw you first," she said. "You're too good-looking for the business."

"I wish he were here so we could keep an eye on him," Jack said. "We've been dancing about half an hour, haven't we?"

"Yes," she said. "Don't you like it?"

"I would under other circumstances, but Bill's going to get nervous pretty soon. I wonder where the Big Boy is."

He felt her shiver. "I wish you'd get him off your mind. Hold me closer. We're supposed to be in love."

It was another quarter hour before he saw Big Ben. He had stepped in from the grounds outside. He wore a charcoal flannel suit, black shoes and a dark tie.

He felt her shiver again. "If he cuts in," she said, "cut back soon. Please, Jack."

"All right," he said, "but don't discourage him."

Big Ben's glance roved over the dancers. Jack noticed that he pulled his coat straight, then he took a handkerchief and passed it over his forehead, though he had not been dancing. He made a gesture with his hands as though he were ridding them of dust.

"He sees us now," she said. "He's coming over."

A second later he slapped Jack on the shoulder. "Hello, Oberlin."

"Why, hello, Alabama Baptist U."

Big Ben's laugh was easy and infectious.

"Your guessing cap's on crooked, boy," he said. "Not Alabama, Mississippi. And now may I relieve you of your lovely burden?"

"You mean you want to dance with my girl? All right, but only for a little while."

"Oh, now," Ruth said, "don't act jealous, Jack. I'd love to dance with Ben just as long as he wants." She gave Big Ben one of her dazzling smiles.

Jack Rhyce walked to an open doorway and watched them. Like many large men, Big Ben danced very well. It was a sordid matter, standing there watching Ruth and the big man dancing. Seeing them dance was like watching the merging of two different worlds, a world of grace and refinement with another of ruthless force. He saw Ruth's lips move in some smiling remark. He saw Big Ben answer, and he did not care to guess what they had said.

He looked into the night. The cottage called Chrysanthemum Rest was completely visible. Though its shades and curtains were drawn, its rooms were lighted, as was the path that led toward it from one of the hotel verandas. But if one were to follow another path up toward the greenhouses, there would be shadow and concealment. A glance at his wrist watch told him it was time—10:20—for Ruth and him to walk into the shadowy grounds together. He moved across to where she was dancing with Big Ben.

"Okay, Baptist," Jack said, "the half is over."

"Aw, gee, coach," Big Ben said, "nobody's even blown the whistle. How about us all meeting in the bar in a while? I'm going there right now to drown my frustrations, honey."

Ruth Bogart giggled. "We'll be there, won't we, darling?"

Jack put his arm around her. "We'll see you down there, Ben."

"We'll dance a few minutes," Ruth said, "and then I want to go out and get a breath of fresh air. It's awfully hot in here."

Big Ben laughed uproariously. "You didn't want fresh air when I asked you three minutes ago, honey. Well, no hard feelings. So long, troops."

They danced for a minute or two without speaking.

"He's gone," Jack said, "and he hasn't gone outside, either."

"That's so," she said. "I don't believe he's on to us at all."

"What makes you say that?" Jack asked her.

"If you want to know—from his very clumsy efforts with me."

"It could be that we're barking up the wrong tree," Jack said. "It could be that he's just a lonely soul. . . ."

"It could be," she said. "But there was one queer thing. He hadn't been dancing but he was all in a glow, wringing wet with perspiration. Did you notice him dust his hands and wipe his forehead when he came in? Whatever he was doing, he was exercising."

"Well, he's gone now. Let's go out and look at the moon."

THEY WALKED toward the greenhouses, talking softly. A number of other couples were wandering about the grounds. While they walked they examined *Chrysanthemum Rest* from all angles. There was a clump of bamboo by its door, which was the only cover near it. Jack was sure that he had missed nothing. He could swear that *Chrysanthemum Rest* was clear. They sat for a while on a bench in the shadow of an old cryptomeria.

"Does it look all right to you?" he asked.

"There's only one offbeat thing. We've been out here for fifteen minutes, and no one's moved inside the house. Not a shadow against the curtains—nothing. Perhaps he isn't there."

"He wants it to look as if he weren't. He's a smart operator."

The danger that someone might notice them entering *Chrysanthemum Rest* was a calculated risk which the bamboo thicket by the door would minimize. The door would be unlocked. There would only be the crucial second when they crossed the threshold. Nevertheless, he delayed for a while. He wished that he could be sure that Big Ben was in the bar.

"Come on. Let's go," he said. His arm tightened around her waist. "Follow me quick," he whispered.

They were inside the house in a twinkling; the door was closed behind them without a sound and without a fingerprint on its knob. They were in a small entrance hall. An open door showed a lighted room, furnished with wicker easy chairs and a couch. There was a Chinese rug on the floor and gay Japanese prints decorated the walls. The room, to Jack Rhyce's surprise, was empty. He could detect no sound except the blare of the dance music. He gestured to Ruth and they moved along the wall so that their shadows would not show on the drawn curtains.

"Bill," he whispered. Later, he never could recall what it was that made him sure that he would not be answered.

The bedroom door was open. The lights were on there, too. He tiptoed to the doorway with Ruth behind him. Bill Gibson, in a pair of Shantung-silk pajamas, lay beneath the covers of his bed, eyes closed, head resting on his pillow, his clothes neatly folded on a chair. A glass, a half-empty bottle of whiskey and a pill bottle stood under the lamp on the bedside table. His restful posture gave every indication that he was asleep, but he was not breathing. Bill Gibson was stone dead.

Jack felt in his pocket and drew on a pair of gloves. "Better go through his suitcase, Ruth," he whispered. But he knew there would not be anything they wanted.

While she moved noiselessly about the room, he stood gazing at the body of Bill Gibson, trying to estimate this new situation. Now that Bill was dead, a whole new line of action was required. He was still in the grip of shock, but he was able to see that he was looking at a professional, almost a classic job of elimination. The only trouble was that, for the job to have been perfect, Bill should have been discovered in the morning, and doubtless that had been the intention. This was encouraging; it showed that no one knew that Bill was there for a meeting and that he and Ruth Bogart were not suspected yet.

The job was one that had obviously required meticulous planning. It also betrayed an anxiety to keep things quiet which was understandable to anyone in the business, where violent ways of taking out a man always offered embarrassing complications. The danger of complication here was very small indeed. Jack did not believe that a doctor called in the morning would, with the evidence before him, make more than a perfunctory examination; no doubt if a more thorough examination should be made this contingency would have been provided for. He picked up the pill bottle, which still held three yellow capsules, a very pretty touch when added to the cork which had fallen to the floor. A drunken man had accidentally taken an overdose of sleeping pills. Jack had no doubt that a lethal dose was safely in the stomach. There were several ways to make reluctant people swallow.

Jack set down the pill bottle and sniffed at Bill Gibson's lips. There was the requisite odor of whiskey. It had been applied over-liberally to the lips, but no one would have noticed in the morn-

ing. Like every killing in the business, this one had its signature, and it was ridiculously easy to decipher once you knew it was a killing. The job presupposed enormous and expert strength. It had required someone who could take care of Bill Gibson as gently and effortlessly as a nurse might handle a baby, and Bill was no weakling. He touched Bill's hand. The body was still warm. He slipped his hand under the head. The mark of a hypodermic was barely visible in the hair at the base of the neck. If one had not known exactly where to look, the mark could easily have gone unnoticed.

Ruth Bogart was looking at him from across the room.

"Ben was here all right," he said. "I wish I could have the privilege of polishing off that rat. I thought a lot of Bill."

"Yes, so did I," she said.

But when you were gone you were gone, in this game. His attention turned to the neatly folded clothes. Bill must have planned to meet them in pajamas and a dressing gown. A Burgundy silk dressing gown hung from a hook on the bathroom door. There was a slight tear at the right elbow, the silk was scuffed and a few tiny hairs of blue woolen lint were mingled with the fabric. It was pile from the Chinese carpet in the living room.

Ruth Bogart had finished with Bill's baggage and with the contents of his pockets. She shook her head. "Where did it happen?" she asked.

"The living room. He must have grabbed Bill right by the door."

He walked gingerly to the living room and she followed him. Of course there had been a struggle. Big Ben had been all of a glow, and he hadn't been dancing. The signs had been eliminated, yet the impersonal orderliness of the room told its own story of rearrangement. He could reconstruct what had happened as though it were going on now before his eyes—Big Ben in a noiseless bound, towering over Bill, the jolt in the solar plexus that knocked out the wind. Big Ben's arms wrapped around the smaller man's gasping body . . . the fighting for breath . . . the expert hands lowering the struggling man to the floor. . . .

"When you danced with him," he said to Ruth Bogart, "was there anything in his coat?"

"I think so," she said.

It would have been the hypodermic.

"They don't know about us yet," he said, "or they wouldn't have pulled it this way. We'd better get out of here, and brace yourself. There's one thing more that's going to be tough tonight."

"What else?" she asked, and he saw that her nerves were shaken.

"We've got to go and meet that rat in the bar, and we'd better be in the mood for it, because he's a smart Joe. Kiss me. Put some lipstick on my cheek. He's got to know we've been out in the garden making love."

No matter what happened in the business you had to go on with the show. You learned how to dish it out and to take it, too. When they left the small building, Jack's arm was around her, and they stopped and kissed shamelessly underneath a light on the path. Their abandon had a quality that was partially genuine.

"You're adorable," he said loudly.

"Darling," she said, "not *here*. Everyone will see us."

Their words and actions were only a shadow on his deeper thoughts. He did not have ice water in his veins any more than she, and he had not recovered from the impact of Bill Gibson's pseudo-quiet death. In his imagination he could see Big Ben pinning Bill down, gasping and helpless. The scene in Chrysanthemum Rest was playing on his emotions, which wasn't right. He felt Ruth shiver, and he shook her in a rough playful way.

"Pull yourself together," he said. "The show's on the road."

"All right," she said. "So it's on the road, and stop being a space cadet."

He straightened his blue coat and felt his belt. He might not be carrying a weapon but a properly fixed belt was a good substitute. He wished that he could slash his belt across Big Ben's face just once. Twice would be better—twice and Big Ben's closest relative wouldn't know him.

THE ATMOSPHERE in the Main Bar had changed since he and Ruth Bogart had been there last. There was no doubt any longer that the patrons—aside from their Japanese girl friends—realized that they were far from home. Their loneliness had begun drawing them together, so that an undercurrent of companionship in misery formed the motif for the now crowded bar. A sea of smoke and voices washed like a wave over Jack and Ruth.

"Why, look—there's Big Ben, just where he said he'd be." He leaned down until her hair brushed his cheek. "Remember, he

doesn't know who we are," he whispered. "Just hold that thought, sweet, and give me another kiss."

"Oh, Jack," Ruth said, "Ben's got a man with a squeeze-box with him."

Big Ben stood in the middle of a noisy group near the center of the room, and a man with an accordion was with him.

"Jack," she whispered, "he's changed his shirt." He had been wearing a white shirt at the dance, but now his shirt was blue.

"That's right," Jack said. "He's been having a busy evening, sweet. Wave to him. He's seen us now."

"Hi, Ben," she called.

"Why, sweetness!" Big Ben shook his finger at her. "Say, whatever have you been doing to Oberlin?"

Ruth glanced at Jack's face. She gave a stifled scream.

"Oh, Jack," she said. "I'm sorry. They told me in the States that it wouldn't come off, darling."

Jack Rhyce grinned self-consciously, then he pulled out a handkerchief, wiped his cheeks and lips and shook his head. "This isn't the States, dear. Maybe nothing's kissproof in Japan."

It was a pretty good line, and the laugh that greeted it confirmed his impression. A man with lipstick on him couldn't help but be a nice guy. There was no sharpness in Big Ben's glance.

"Say, boy," Big Ben said. "Let's do a song for the crowd."

Ruth gave him a playful push. "Go ahead, Jack," she said. "You can sing just as well as he can."

Big Ben was holding a half-empty highball glass. He was cold sober, but he was abnormally elated. It was the sort of elation that came after emergence from danger. He was happy, and he must have felt completely safe. "How about 'Every Day Is Ladies' Day With Me'?" he said.

"Why is it you have this yen for *The Red Mill*?" Jack asked.

Big Ben drew his hand across his eyes. "It's a kind of theme song with me. Will you sing it with me if I tell you why?"

His invitation, which included a group around them, had a professional tone. He was a born master of ceremonies.

"Why, sure," Jack said, "if it's a good yarn."

"Aw, shucks, it isn't much of a one—just kid stuff." His voice was eager and appealing. "It was senior year in this Baptist college down South. . . . There was this banker in town—the local rich guy—and he had this pretty daughter. Well, my folks

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were poor, in the missionary business actually, and I was sort of shy back then. For two years I used to walk past her house most every night, without daring to knock on the door, and then comes senior year. That autumn when I'd sort of built up my ego by playing football, I walked up and rang the bell, and there she was all alone, and she asked me to come inside. Well, she asked me if I liked hearing music on the phonograph. She put on this *Red Mill* record, and held my hand, and then—well, we kinda got to loving each other with that old *Red Mill* playing." Big Ben's voice grew softer. "Then her old man came in, and he kicked me out. I never saw her again, but that's how I remember *The Red Mill*."

He had held his audience, and there were sympathetic murmurs applauding his tale of young frustration. Something had happened then, and *The Red Mill* was its monument and the music of youth was always the best music.

"Well," Big Ben said, "stand up here, Jack. Let's show 'em. Strike up the band. 'Every Day Is Ladies' Day With Me.'"

Bill Gibson was dead at Chrysanthemum Rest. Their arms were draped over each other's shoulders as they sang, and applause came from all over the bar when they had finished.



"Say, Jack," Big Ben said, "if we only had straw hats and canes, we could soft-shoe it, couldn't we?"

"We don't need hats and canes," Jack Rhyce said.

"Why, we don't sure enough," Big Ben said. "Come on."

It wasn't a bad show. Jack Rhyce had to admit that they both had an unusual gift of comic interpolation. He was tempted to join in the laughter of the crowd as he watched Big Ben slip deliberately and recover himself. His impulse to laugh died when he saw Ruth Bogart's expression as she watched them. An instant later he picked out Mr. Moto. He was standing near the street entrance of the bar. When the dance was over, Jack looked toward the spot where the Japanese had been standing, but he was gone.

"Well, folks," Jack Rhyce said, "it's been nice seeing you. Come on, Ruth. Let's say good night."

They had done what was necessary, and the clock showed it was ten minutes to twelve. He could tell from the tight grip of her hand when they walked toward the Cozy Nook ell that her nervous resistance was wearing thin.

"Jack—" she said, as they closed the door of their room.

"Just a minute before you say anything," he told her. "Just let me wash the touch of that goon off me first. I'm sorry, Ruth."

When he came back she said, "You've washed the lipstick off and now you won't have anything to remember me by. Please unzip the back of my dress. I don't know why people sell unzippable dresses."

"Maybe they do it to get girls into trouble," he said.

"Jack," she said, "don't you think it would look better if we turned out the lights? We don't know who's watching."

"Just get it into your head no one's watching. We're out of this as of now."

"But it won't be long," she said. "And it would be better if you did turn out the lights. I must look like hell. I feel like it anyway."

"So do I. We haven't exactly been playing charades tonight."

He turned out the lights, except the one in the bathroom.

"Jack," she said, "I don't know anything about Bill Gibson's setup here, do you?"

"No," he answered, "and we won't, now Bill's dead."

"What are we going to do?"

It was the question he had been asking himself, because he was

left with no contacts, unless he communicated with home, and that was far too dangerous.

"Maybe we'll think of something in the morning," he said.

"Come here. Come closer. I want to ask you something. Why did they kill Bill?" she whispered.

"Because he knew something they didn't want passed on."

"But what did he know?" she asked.

"We've got to try to find out, come morning."

"Jack," she said, "wasn't it awful?" He felt her arms steal around his neck, and she buried her face against his shoulder.

"Go ahead and cry," he said. "I don't blame you, Ruth."

"I'm not going to cry, but I'm glad you're here."

"I wish you weren't," he said.

"Oh, Jack," she said, "I don't think that's very polite."

"It's too dangerous here," he said. "Let's face it. I love you, Ruth—and I'm not pretending."

"I'd almost given up hoping that you'd ever say it."

"Well, I have. But it's a fool thing for anyone like me to say."

It was bad for business to fall in love, but there they were, alone together with their secrets, miles from any help except what they could give each other.

Later it was easy enough to tell himself that no one should rely on convictions that had no solid foundation of fact—except that his belief that they were in the clear did have its foundation: Bill Gibson would not have been killed in the way he had if anyone had suspected who Jack Rhyce and Ruth Bogart were. But still, Jack realized, he should have been more alert. The trouble was, there had been so much on his mind that he had yielded to the temptation of blacking out the whole problem for a few hours that night, which had been inexcusable. You always paid for it, but he never dreamed that he would pay so soon.

Chapter 8

THE HOUR when he was awakened must have been shortly after two. The callers were expert operators. The first he knew of anything wrong was when they switched on the ceiling lights. In the instant his sight was adjusting to the light, he was on his feet.

"Please, Mr. Rhyce, no noise, please."

Mr. Moto and two stocky Japanese in blue serge suits were in the bedroom.

Ruth Bogart, in her twin bed next the wall, reached for her handbag, but the man nearest to her knocked it from her hand.

"Quiet, please," Mr. Moto said. His English had become impeccable. "Get dressed, please, Mr. Rhyce. The man here will hand you your clothes." Mr. Moto smiled politely. "He was a valet for a member of your Cabinet in Washington—before the war, of course."

The loquaciousness disturbed Jack Rhyce because it indicated Mr. Moto's belief that he held the cards. He wished he was not barefoot in pajamas, and he also wished he could keep down his rising anger.

"I'll give you and your chumps just ten seconds to clear out," he said, "or I'll throw you out, right through that window."

Mr. Moto raised his hand in a placating gesture.

"Please," he said, "make no disturbance, Mr. Rhyce, or I shall be obliged to call for the police."

"How's that again, you little yellow rat?"

"Please do not be insulting," Mr. Moto said, "though I can understand how you feel, Mr. Rhyce. I mentioned the police."

"So you're a cop, are you?"

Mr. Moto shook his head. "I am just what you are, Mr. Rhyce, and you and I do not want cops. I only want a quiet talk with you."

"Go ahead, you yellow rat. Call in your police."

He had made the Japanese angry, which was a useless luxury.

"I do not understand," Mr. Moto said. "You must be an intelligent man to have been sent here, and your work was very good last evening—but not the police, Mr. Rhyce. I should have to tell them that you and the lady had murdered Mr. Gibson."

"Well, well, so that's the picture, is it? All right, tell your valet to hand me my pants and a clean white shirt." He pulled on his trousers over his pajamas. The first surprise was leaving him. He pointed to his shoes and socks, and when they were handed to him he stole a glance at Ruth Bogart. Her face was white.

"Please, may I repeat, you did it very well?" Mr. Moto said. "So neat with the pills, so nice with the needle. No reason to tell the police."

Jack pulled a shirt over his head, tightened his belt carefully.

"Not the belt, please," Mr. Moto said. "I should rather hear Big Ben strike only over the BBC."

He heard Ruth Bogart draw in her breath.

"So you've got me down for Big Ben?" Jack said.

"Yes," Mr. Moto said. "Your coat, please, Mr. Rhyce. We will leave quietly. Miss Bogart will stay here. She will understand that it will do no good to make trouble. I shall drive her back to Tokyo in the morning."

"You don't know what you're doing," Ruth began.

It was not the time to break security; indeed it was a question whether they would have been believed. Jack smiled at her and shook his head. "I don't think there's much you can do, Ruth," he said, "the way the ball is bouncing."

"But, Jack," she said, "they're going to—"

"Let's not be mind readers," he said.

"It is so true," Mr. Moto said, "what you say about the ball bouncing. One day it is you. One day it is me. The young lady is not important. I can give you my assurance that I will see her off for home from the airport tomorrow." He picked up her handbag and tossed it to one of the men. "I shall give this back also tomorrow."

Jack said, "Do you mind if I ask you one question?"

"If it is short. The sooner we leave the better, Mr. Rhyce."

"What makes you think I killed that man?"

"Because he knew too much. We're going where we can have a quiet talk, and I think you will tell us what he knew before we are finished. Moscow does not know all the tricks."

"You ought to know I'm not a graduate from there. Well, as long as I have your word about Miss Bogart—"

"I never do anything unnecessary. Why should she come to harm? Are you ready now, Mr. Rhyce?"

"Jack—" Ruth began. Her voice was dangerously loud.

"Don't, Ruth," he said "—but it's been nice to have known you. Come on, let's go."

They walked in a compact, softly stepping group down a flight of stairs and out into the night. It was dark and very still. A car was parked on the hotel drive. "You will sit in the front with me, please," Mr. Moto said. "The men will be in the back. One of them will have you covered. He is a good man with a pistol."

Jack got into the car. Mr. Moto took the wheel. The place where they went was not far from the hotel. It was a substantially built Japanese house surrounded by a high wall.

"You will step out quietly, please," Mr. Moto said.

"Tell that goon of yours to take his hand off me," Jack said. "I can still get out of a car."

A light burning above the doorway showed the platform where one sat to remove one's shoes, but there was no neat row of shoes such as one might have seen if the house had been occupied. One of the men opened the front door, at the same time switching on the lights in the entrance hall.

"The man will not touch you," Mr. Moto said. "Walk behind me into the house, please."

There was a distance of about six paces of gravel driveway between the car and the hallway of the house. Mr. Moto walked ahead of him, not bothering to look back, but the man walking behind was overanxious. He was too close, as Jack could tell from the sound of his steps. If you held a gun at someone's back, one of the first principles was to keep a decent interval.

Jack whirled on the ball of his right foot. He had the man's wrist in his left hand and the barrel of the pistol diverted to the ground in the split second before he brought his fist across to the jaw with all the momentum of his body behind it. The pistol exploded at the same moment. Then the hand that held it relaxed, and Jack Rhyce had the weapon—from its size and weight, another Beretta. Mr. Moto turned and Jack spoke.

"Shall we leave it the way it is?" he said. "I told you I didn't want that man crowding me—and tell the other one to stop."

Mr. Moto gave a curt order. "I am so sorry he annoyed you," he said. "He was very clumsy."

"Just overanxious. Let's not you and me get overanxious. I'll get you anyway before you and the other one get me."

They stood motionless for seconds that seemed to last for a long while.

"Yes," Mr. Moto said. "Yes, and what do you suggest?"

"You tell that friend of yours behind you," Jack Rhyce said, "to come over here and help his friend. He's coming to, now. I don't like being treated this way, Mr. Moto."

"Yes," Mr. Moto said, "yes?"

"You tell your two people to keep out of the way," Jack said,

"and I'll go into that house with you. I want to talk to you as much as you want to talk to me. I'm not Big Ben, and I didn't kill Bill Gibson. Frankly, he was my boss."

"You are not Big Ben?" There was doubt in Mr. Moto's voice.

"You're damned well right I'm not. I'm on the American team. Gibson came up here to meet me. He was dead when we got to the cottage, and I want to know what he knew as much as you do."

"You may put the pistol of the clumsy man in your pocket, Mr. Rhyce," Mr. Moto said. "If you gave it to him now he would kill himself for shame, but I am grateful to him for his clumsiness. You would have shot it out with me if you had been Big Ben."

"Yes," Jack Rhyce said. "That's exactly the point I've been trying to make. Here, take the gun." He tossed the pistol on the driveway.

"Thank you," Mr. Moto said. "I am very mortified that I should be so mistaken. Excuse me, please."

"That's all right. It's too bad we didn't know sooner we were after the same boy."

"It was so very stupid of me," Mr. Moto said again. "So you were after Big Ben, too?"

"Yes," Jack said, and everything was easy now. "That's what I was sent over from the States for. Gibson wanted help."

The man on the ground groaned and struggled to his knees. Jack pulled him to his feet. "Out like a light, weren't you?" He slapped him affectionately on the back. "Never mind. We're pals now."

Mr. Moto laughed. "His English is not good. Tell him in Japanese."

"I apologize for your discomfort," Jack said in Japanese. "So it was the tea and the coffee back there at the hotel that gave me away on the language, was it?"

"Oh, no," Mr. Moto said. "Earlier, Mr. Rhyce. In Burma, we had your name on file. Japanese linguist, lived in Japan."

"The word always was that you people had good Intelligence, but I didn't know you were working so hard at it now."

"Oh, not so hard," Mr. Moto said, "with shortness of funds and the misfortunes. Poor Japan. We would not have made a mistake such as I made tonight, before the war."

"It's a tough life, all right," Jack Rhyce said. "It's beginning to get me down these days."

"Get you down? I wish so much I could visit your great country more often. I cannot keep up with the idiom now. Before everything was so unhappy, I was over once a year at least. Even when my duties were in Paris and London I endeavored to spend a week or two of observation in New York. . . . In old New York the peach crop's always fine, isn't it, Mr. Rhyce?"

"I wish I knew where you picked that one up," Jack said.

"A song from *The Red Mill* was sung in the third-floor corridor of the Mark Hopkins Hotel in San Francisco," Mr. Moto answered, "the evening before you left, Mr. Rhyce."

"You Japs get things twisted. I didn't sing the song."

"So sorry I have been so very stupid," Mr. Moto said. "This house is loaned, for a purpose which I am so glad is now not necessary, by a very kind Japanese nobleman. Come in, please, and my associates will warm us some sake."

The furnishings of the entrance hall gave forth a musty odor, from age and disuse; but they were elaborate, designed to impress the European guest. The hall carpet was crimson, sprinkled with fleurs-de-lis; the wallpaper artificial cordovan leather; the mirror bad Victorian; and the chairs golden oak, upholstered with red plush. The European section of such houses was usually as ugly and uncomfortable as its Japanese counterpart was beautiful.

Mr. Moto must have read Jack's thoughts.

"We used to try so hard," he said. "Poor Japan. The chairs are equally hideous in the parlor, but Americans like chairs."

Several lighted table lamps in the parlor revealed oil paintings of English cattle, and upholstered easy chairs. There was a European fireplace with a coal grate, in which a fire glowed in spite of the hot night. On the coffee table were knotted strings and leather thongs and a pair of handcuffs. "Well, well," Jack said, "so you were fixing to have a singing school."

Mr. Moto laughed. "So nice a way you have of saying funny things." He called an order in angry Japanese. "Take these away and bring the sake and cigarettes. Please sit down, Mr. Rhyce."

Jack Rhyce sat down in one of the easy chairs. The sake came immediately, in a jar with a glaze that looked like celadon.

"Beautiful," Jack Rhyce said, nodding at the jar.

"You appreciate it? I am so pleased. It has been in the Baron's family for many hundred years. The Baron would be pleased to present it to you. He is my cousin. You enjoy the wine?"

"I do," Jack Rhyce said. "It's nice and hot."

"To happy peace between the United States and poor Japan," Mr. Moto said. "Very foolish men made the war. Ha-ha. Nearly all of them are dead."

Jack drank and held out his cup for more.

"Judging from my short stay here," he said, "it looks to me as though Japan is going to make out pretty well."

"I am glad you think so. It is very lovely to talk to an intelligent American again who is engaged in my own line of work. Let me see. There were once such nice men in your Intelligence in Washington. Do you remember Colonel Bryson? I was so sorry he broke his neck in Vienna. Then there was Mr. Makepeace. What has become of him, I wonder?" Mr. Moto was checking on Jack's background, and Jack was relieved he could come up with an answer.

"He was in Prague six years ago, but since then he has not been heard from."

"So too bad so many lovely people cannot live forever. Some more wine, Mr. Rhyce?"

"Thanks, I could do with a little more," Jack said.

Mr. Moto gestured to one of the men.

"Poor Japan. We never can understand how you Westerners can drink so much and not lose your wits. That turn on the right foot was very beautiful. I could admire it even when I did not know what might follow. But I did know that the move was not Russian."

"They'll be pleased to know that, back home."

"Please, I hope you will treat my errors kindly. I did not have the benefit of records because ours were destroyed in the bombing. Therefore, I can only rely on memory—but you were in Japan until the age of five. You were in Japanese-language school in Colorado, because one of my own young men taught you and reported you as far above the average. Please do not make a mental note. Your Counterintelligence found him out. Then you were in Combat Intelligence in Burma. You were in Moscow in 1946, and you made a remark to Mr. Molotov in Russian. You said all men are brothers."

Jack Rhyce winced. It was growing clearer every minute why Mr. Moto should have confused him with Big Ben.

"Then there was an alert in my echelon, just as there must have

been in yours. Orders to look for a new personality, an American. The name—Big Ben. Popular. Someone on your stage. Look out for this American—Big Ben, with the singing voice and with the weakness for singing a song from *Red Mill*. Imagine my joy to hear of you from San Francisco. So pleased when I saw you at the airport. So pleased about the Friendship League, which we have watched with interest. So pleased about your week-end excursion, where Mr. Gibson was going. So pleased when you and the pretty Miss Bogart entered Chrysanthemum Rest—and then to find you are American Intelligence is difficult. I should have kept an open mind, but you will admit that everything did fit."

"Don't blame yourself too much," Jack Rhyce said. "Anyway, you're not Russian. I've been worried about that."

"Nationalist Japan Party, Mr. Rhyce. Pro-Emperor, anti-Communist. So much trouble—poor Japan. But when the typhoon ceases, back will spring the bamboo."

"Are Nationalists anti-American these days?" Jack asked.

Mr. Moto shook his head. "Not now. The United States is so very useful. So silly to shoot Santa Claus. You see, I'm being very frank, because I hope that we will be temporary partners. There are groups here anxious to arouse feeling against America. And the plain Japanese man can change so quickly."

He paused and Jack had a moment to speculate on Mr. Moto's background. He came from the old aristocracy. He must have been educated abroad, probably in an Eastern American university.

"The Left Wing has been growing very dangerously lately," Mr. Moto said. "At the moment we are as anxious as you are to uphold American prestige, and I am willing to pool information."

Jack appeared to hesitate, even though the man seated opposite must have known that he had no choice.

"I don't see why we shouldn't do business, but I had no briefing from Mr. Gibson, you understand. That was to have occurred up here. He only told me that he was being followed."

He did not blame Mr. Moto for looking discouraged. It was time to hurry on and show that he had some value.

"Still, Mr. Gibson sent us back a few facts," he went on. "Big Ben has been meeting a Russian agent named Skirov at intervals. Do you know Skirov?"

Mr. Moto's features sharpened. "An *après-guerre* Russian, well

trained, and very dangerous. We have tried very hard to find him."

"We rate him above Big Ben," Jack Rhyce said. "I've never seen him, but we have a photograph and description. It might amuse you to know that when I found you in our room I had a hunch that you might be Skirov."

"So funny how often people confuse things when they get fixed ideas. What other information did Mr. Gibson send back home?"

"Bill believed that there was a meeting between Skirov and Big Ben coming up. He had learned something new, but he did not have time to tell me."

Mr. Moto lighted a cigarette. "Perhaps I know somewhat more than you about what was troubling Mr. Gibson. I am sorry that you do not know your apparatus here. I was hoping we could have profitable exchange of facts."

"You mean you won't tell me any more because you don't think I know anything worth while?"

"Yes," Mr. Moto said, "so sorry, Mr. Rhyce."

It was clear to Jack that he could achieve nothing unless he had coöperation. There was a risk, but it was a necessary one.

"Okay," he said. "Suppose I told you I've found Big Ben. Suppose I could finger him for you . . . then would you tell me what you think was on my boss's mind?"

The Japanese gave a violent start. "You mean he's in Japan now?"

"You tell me what Big Ben and Skirov are going to do," Jack said, "and I'll tell you who Big Ben is. What's so important about this Skirov meeting?"

"We are still trying to discover. Mr. Gibson knew—otherwise he would still be living. Our information is that they are planning some coup with political repercussions that would adversely affect your country. I think there will be political murder and afterward public demonstrations."

"Who's going to get murdered?" Jack Rhyce asked.

"It would be a murder that would be ascribed to United States imperialism; one of a liberal politician. We do not know who, but we think we know the date—three days from now."

Bill Gibson must have known the date as well. Jack was trying to put together the details of that hurried call on the day of their arrival, the Chevrolet with the Beretta in the glove compartment,



and the Asia Friendship League. "Do you know a man named Harry Pender," he said, "who is heading the Asia Friendship League now? He was transferred recently from Cambodia, I think."

Mr. Moto raised his eyebrows. "You spent the day with Mr. Pender before you drove here, Mr. Rhyce."

"That's right. Have you any information on him?"

"He is a very naughty man," Mr. Moto said. "His alias is Harry Wise. Hank is his cover name in the apparatus."

Jack Rhyce nodded. That name meant quite a lot.

"Moscow has been moving their first team in here, in the last two weeks," Mr. Moto said. "But now I wish to hear from you. Where is Big Ben, Mr. Rhyce?"

"Haven't you guessed? He was right there with me in the bar and you saw us do that dance together. He's a flight engineer on an American air line."

Mr. Moto slapped his hand against his forehead. "Oh, dear me," he said. "Excuse me, Mr. Rhyce. This is very serious. I've been so very stupid. We must leave here right away."

"Well," Jack Rhyce said, "I'm glad it rings a bell with you."

"Ha-ha," Mr. Moto said, "yes, it rings a bell. It would be funny if I were not so ashamed. He said he was United States Intelligence, last night, after you sang the song. He told me you were Big Ben. I can make no excuse for my carelessness, Mr. Rhyce, except that I was so sure of you."

"How's that?" Jack responded incredulously.

Mr. Moto hesitated as though he did not like what he was about to say. "You were so much more intelligent, so much more of a trained agent, so much more dangerous—while he, if you will excuse me, was so immature, so harmless, like so many of your government officials. But please believe I was astute enough to recognize my error when you took my man's gun away."

Never to underestimate an adversary was a motto of the business. Had Big Ben learned through some fluke who the couple in Cozy Nook were, and had he taken that method to knock them out of the game? This was unbelievable in Jack's judgment. Big Ben had shown no professional interest in them while they had been in the bar, but something had occurred later to cause a change. His glance must have picked out Mr. Moto's face in the crowd and instantly recognized him as a Japanese agent. Mr.

Moto had spelled danger, and Big Ben had conceived the smoke screen that permitted escape. He must have suspected that Mr. Moto had come to the hotel to make contact with Bill Gibson. While they were still doing that soft-shoe dance Big Ben must have been fairly certain that Mr. Moto would visit Chrysanthemum Rest. Being in the business himself, Mr. Moto would know that it was murder. Big Ben had been obliged to move quickly.

"Let's get our lines straight," Jack said. "You saw us go into that cottage. Then you went into the cottage yourself. When did you get to the bar?"

"When you and he were dancing," Mr. Moto said.

"He'll be halfway to Tokyo by now. I suggest that we drive back in the morning, and I'll see Pender first thing Monday. The name is Ben Bushman. You can check him at the hotel."

"Yes. And what is it that Mr. Gibson knew that makes him dead tonight? I hope in another day to have the full details."

"And you'll let me know?" Jack Rhyce said.

"Yes," Mr. Moto said, "with pleasure, Mr. Rhyce."

"I'll appreciate it," Jack Rhyce said. "Maybe you wouldn't mind walking back with me until you can point out the hotel."

"Yes," Mr. Moto said, "we should be moving before it grows too light. There is only one thing more I have to say. If you'll excuse me, there may be much trouble, in which case it might be just as well if you did not tell Miss Bogart what we have been saying."

"I agree with you. She won't be useful here any longer. Suppose we send her home on Monday?"

"With so much pleasure," Mr. Moto said. "She is a very lovely lady. And now we should start back."

It was still dark outside but a refreshing coolness in the air told the hour almost as accurately as a watch. In half an hour the sky would begin to lighten and the stars would disappear.

"A VERY lovely dawn," Mr. Moto said. "I shall let you proceed alone. A lovely time for a walk if one has difficulty with sleeping. That is what I should say to the hallboy if you should see him. He will be interested to see you returning. He also is in what you call the business, Mr. Rhyce."

The hotel was dark, except for the lights in the corridors and along the drive. A path led through a garden of ponds and tiny

cascades bordered with dwarf pines and maple, to the upper terrace. He was halfway across it when he saw Ruth, and he knew she had been watching as he walked up the drive.

"Jack," she whispered.

"Why, sweetness," he said, "were you looking for me? I went out for a little stroll. I thought you were sound asleep."

"I wish you'd told me, dear," she answered. "It did make me frightened to wake up all alone. Are you all right?"

"Oh, yes, dear. I'm sorry I frightened you, but let's forget about it now, and sneak upstairs."

They walked up the stairs of the Cozy Nook ell without another word until they were inside their room. From the way she clung to him he knew she had been afraid for him. It all went to show how unwise it was for two people in the business to become emotionally involved. His concern for her threatened to throw other factors out of balance, but there was nothing he could do about it.

"It's all right," he said. "There wasn't any trouble."

"Did you have to tell them who we were?" she asked.

"Oh, I had to tell them this and that."

"Did you find out what Bill Gibson knew?"

"No," he answered, "not exactly."

"Jack," she whispered, "why aren't you telling me the truth?"

"Because from now on it's safer to keep you in the dark."

"I don't care whether it's safe or not," she said. "I want to stay in this with you."

He was moved by her wish. "Thanks," he answered, "but the thing's moved far enough so that you're not necessary here any more. I want you to be back in Washington ready to meet me at the airport when I get there. It would be common sense even if I had not lost my head about you, Ruth."

Yet if he had not cared about her, it was possible that he might have still thought her useful. Anyone as attractive as she, and as good an operator, always did have uses.

"This shouldn't have happened with you and me," he said. "It was all a great mistake—professionally speaking, Ruth."

"I'm not going back," she said. "You're going to want me around when you know what I know."

"It's got to be awfully good," he said.

"It is. I know how to get Big Ben. What do you think of that?"

"You mean you've seen our boy again?" he asked.

She giggled in that annoying way that she used so well as cover.

"Am I going home on the first plane?" she asked.

"Go ahead," he answered, "and tell me about our boy."

"Well, it was this way. After you left with those people I didn't know exactly what to do. I know you told me to stay here, but I felt I had to do something, and so I went downstairs and out to the driveway, and who do you think I saw?"

"All right, you saw Big Ben. What was he doing?"

"He had come out of the hotel with one of those big Army Val-paks. He was putting it in the back of a car."

"A dark-green Chevrolet coupe with a dented fender?"

"Yes," she said. "Naturally."

"They haven't got much of a car pool, have they? But then, they didn't know we'd spotted it. Was he in a hurry?"

"No, he was perfectly natural," she said. "I didn't think we ought to let him go away like that, so I walked out into the driveway and said hello."

"Was he surprised? How did he act?"

"Natural. He didn't seem surprised at all. He said, 'Why, hi, there. Are you looking for the boy friend?' And I said, 'Yes. A sort of funny thing happened. A Japanese knocked on the door a while ago and asked him to step out for a minute, and he hasn't come back, and I'm wondering where he is.'"

She had said all the right things. She knew her business.

"He laughed," she went on. "He said, 'It was only a little joke I played, honey. He'll be coming back all right. I was just coming up to knock on your door as soon as I'd stowed this bag.'"

"I asked him if he honestly meant that he had got you out of the way on purpose and he said, 'It was just a gag. But I'm crazy about you, honey, and what you need is a real man and not one of those do-gooders.' How do you like that one, darling?"

"I don't like it. What did you tell him then?"

"I said I was beginning to like him, too, and I said that you were always so prim and proper, and that I liked people with a real sense of humor. I said I wished he wasn't leaving so soon. It was important to play up to him, wasn't it?"

"Yes," he said. "How much did you play up?"

"Not so very much," she said. "Only when he held me in his arms I kept thinking of Bill Gibson, and wondering where you were. It was darned unpleasant."

It helped him only a little to tell himself that of course she had to do what she had done.

"For just a second I thought he was going to take his bag out of that Chevrolet and stay," she said. "But there was something that made him know he had to go in a hurry. He kept saying, 'Gosh, I wish it wasn't fixed so that I had to leave.'" She gave a perfect imitation of his accent. "He said, 'Honey, this mustn't be good-by. Call me as soon as you get to the city.' Then he wrote down a telephone number and gave it to me. If he wasn't there I was to leave my name and he'd call me back."

"Good going," he said. "I can use that number."

"Oh, no, you can't, because I've torn it up. Besides, he'll know my voice. When you want him, I'm the only one who can talk to him, Jack. And now let's stop being so businesslike. Lord, I wish we were on the outside."

They were a long way from the outside.

"We could have a cabin by a lake," she said. "I'm a pretty good cook, and you could fish or make snowshoes or whatever they do in the woods."

"Yes," he said, "but we'd better talk about it later."

"We could travel," she said. "Think what it would be like if we went to London, and didn't have to check in anywhere, or be startled when we saw one of those familiar faces—if we could just be ourselves, having a quiet breakfast and reading the papers, without having to watch for anything."

"Without a fountain pen in your handbag, dear," he said.

"That reminds me, what happened to my handbag, Jack?"

Her question broke the illusion.

"Moto has it," he said. "He'll bring it in the morning. We're going to pull out of here for Tokyo first thing after breakfast."

"To do what?" she asked.

"Just what we did before," he said. "The Friendship League, Mr. Harry Pender, all that sort of thing."

"Aren't you going to tell me anything?"

"No," he said. "What you don't know won't hurt you."

"Is it as tough as all that?"

"Never mind," he said.

"I don't," she said, "as long as it means you like me."

"That's the trouble," he said. "I like you."

"Then let's talk about the outside some more," she said.

"There are all sorts of things I'd like to tell you—about when I was a girl at school, about parties, about all sorts of things. Jack, it's time we got to know each other in an outside way."

"I know," he said. "Later—there isn't time right now."

There was never time to think about yourself when you were in the business. He wished he could keep her out of it, but it was too late now, after what she had told him. He wished to heaven that he did not have the feeling that time was running out.

Chapter 9

AFTER THEY returned to the Imperial Hotel on Sunday afternoon, he left Ruth in her room. He told her to sit quietly and to read a good book, and he and Mr. Moto left the hotel together in the Buick. He was the foreigner who needed a guide and, if anyone was listening, they had heard him ask to be taken to the Mei-ji Museum. Mr. Moto and he were able to say a good deal by the time they had parked the car in front of the building that housed the pictures illustrating the reign of Japan's greatest Emperor. The hour was so late that the place was closed.

"I know the guardians," Mr. Moto said. "They will put on the lights, and while I telephone you may enjoy the pictures. I think I can do everything from here very safely."

It was a question of Moto's getting the latest news and so Jack walked alone up the marble staircase to the two great galleries. He must have examined the pictures for more than half an hour before Mr. Moto joined him.

"Skirov is believed to be here, but cannot be traced," he said. "There is much activity. Large quantities of banners have been made saying 'Down with American Imperialism' and 'Avenge the People's Martyr.' We will have more definite news by tomorrow, I hope. Some of our best people are working on it. They have found the lodging of your Mr. Ben, but he has not returned."

"Miss Bogart can get him if necessary," Jack Rhyce said.

They did not speak again until they were in the Buick.

"Will it be a large demonstration?" Jack asked.

Mr. Moto nodded.

"Simultaneous outbreaks in different quarters. The street fighters are being given special training. It will be ugly, I

am afraid. A great deal can be accomplished by assassination."

"Depending on whom you assassinate," Jack Rhyce said. "You told me they were going to take out a left-wing liberal. Can you name some prospects?"

"Oh, yes," Mr. Moto said. "Eight, perhaps ten possibilities. I wish so very much Mr. Gibson were alive. Are you sure you know no one else in his apparatus?"

"I told you I didn't. Don't you trust me?"

"Yes, as much as you trust me, I'm afraid. I am not anti-American. I hope that you are not anti-Japanese, Mr. Rhyce."

"Not at the minute. I'm anti-Communist right now."

Mr. Moto cleared his throat. "Would you object," he asked, "if my people were to question Big Ben?"

"Not if it's necessary, but I'd rather have him followed. He can lead us to what we want just as easily that way."

"If we cannot trace him tonight," Mr. Moto said, "I am very much afraid we should use Miss Bogart to find him."

"All right," Jack said.

"From now on, there will be a car and driver in your name, outside of your hotel. He will take you to me at any hour. And please take care of Miss Bogart. She may be so very useful tomorrow."

Jack Rhyce nodded. The net was around Big Ben, and a European was too conspicuous in the Orient to hide for very long. His number was nearly up.

JACK ARRIVED at the Asia Friendship League offices at half past ten next morning to find Harry Pender seated in his office. The light from the window glinted cheerfully on his spectacles as he waved a welcoming hand.

"Come in, Jack," he said. "Are you ready to pick my brains?"

"I'm all set and raring to go, Harry," Jack said.

He was embarrassed that he had not placed Harry Pender until Mr. Moto had explained him, but, after all, he had only seen the face in a group photograph. The man before him was certainly the individual known as Harry Wise, a former American college instructor who had been holding a Communist card since the late 1930's, but with no record of activity. He looked older than his photograph and, since he had not been heard from for some time, he must have been behind the Curtain.

"It sure is nice to see you back," Harry Pender said. "I see in the *Japan Times* that one of our fellow countrymen took too many sleeping pills up there. I hope it didn't spoil your fun."

"There was a little mix-up with the Japanese authorities," Jack said, "but it didn't amount to anything. We left yesterday morning and drove around seeing the sights. I sort of wanted to get the feel of the country."

"That's very wise. A first impression has a lot of value. By the way, where's Ruth Bogart?"

The question indicated unnecessary curiosity. "She wasn't feeling well this morning," Jack answered. "Nothing serious."

"Too bad. Do you want me to send one of my girls over?"

"Oh, no, she's going to be all right. I just told her to take it easy. Well, let's get down to business. You must have some pretty big policy problems, Harry."

Mr. Pender took off his glasses and allowed them to swing like a pendulum between his fingers. He raised his eyebrows inquiringly.

"I mean, for instance," Jack said, "problems of personnel. I was just wondering, well, whether you had any trouble with Communists or anything like that." He had intended to bring out the subject with flat-footed innocence, and from the tolerant way Harry laughed he was rather sure he had.

"Excuse me for laughing, Jack," Harry said, "but that question is characteristic of the point of view that everyone brings here from the States. Why, there's hardly a Communist in Japan—but you will find varieties of liberals. From my observation, democracy has a permanent foothold in Japan."

"Well, it's mighty nice to hear you say so, Harry. I'm glad, too, if there's a healthy liberal party here."

"You'll find liberalism here in the best sense of the word," Harry said, "and the leaders are highly dedicated people. I want you to get to know some, Jack. I want you to get this Communism bias thoroughly washed out of your hair."

"It's curious how distance distorts facts. Back in the States we hardly hear about Japanese Progressives. Who are some of them?"

He hoped that his interest appeared genuine. Harry Pender's eyes were fixed on him.

"There's Hata and Iwara, and Yamashita and Nichiwara," Harry said.

"Who's the best of them, would you say?"

"Every one of them has quite a following, but Noshimura Hata is head and shoulders above the rest. I'll see that you meet him sometime."

"It would be a real pleasure, provided he lives around here."

"He does, as a matter of fact," Harry said, "in an attractive house with a beautiful garden. He's an Oxford graduate, a member of a wealthy family, and a philanthropist."

"Oh," Jack said, "then he can speak English."

Perhaps he should not have pursued the subject so long. His attention was riveted on Harry's swinging glasses. The motion had been accelerated, and there was always betrayal in unconscious gesture. It was time to drop all show of interest in Hata.

"Preconceived opinions are always off the beam, aren't they?" he said. "I had no idea that the Japanese would be so enthusiastic about sports, for instance."

"Sports have a leading priority with us," Harry answered. "Nothing pulls people together so much as meeting on a playing field. . . ."

At least they were away from liberalism. It was necessary to sit there for an hour or more mouthing platitudes. It was ironic to think that Harry Pender and he were each talking for the other's benefit. Did Mr. Pender believe he was impressing him? And did his own guilelessness seem real to Mr. Pender?

It was quarter of twelve when he pushed back his chair. "Harry," he said, "it's been swell of you to give me so much of your time."

"How about a bite of lunch? Not more than five minutes away from here is the best beef-sukiyaki restaurant in the world."

"There's nothing I'd like better, and please give me a rain check," Jack said. "But I'd better go back to the hotel and see how Ruth is. How would lunch tomorrow be? Because I'll be right back here, making a nuisance of myself with another batch of questions."

SHE WAS in her room, reading Terry's *Japanese Empire*.

"Has anything happened here?" he asked.

"Yes," she said. "One thing. Big Ben telephoned."

He tried to forget about her as a person when she told him that. Nothing must interfere with the business. "What did he want?"

"He wanted to make a date for five this afternoon. I told him I wasn't sure I could get away. I said I'd call back at three."

"That's my girl. I think the time has come to pick him up, Ruth. It's a good thing you're along, all right."

"Thank you, sir. How did you get on with Pender?"

"I wish I knew," he said. "He worries me a little. I think I'd better see the Japs again, right off."

"Aren't you going to cut me in on anything?" she asked.

"Only about Big Ben," he said. "Don't ask for any more."

"Jack—be careful. Don't be too sure of yourself."

Frankly, he wished he felt more assured.

He had not been under the porte-cochere for half a minute before the car and the driver that Mr. Moto had indicated the day before appeared. The meeting place was the back room of a curio shop.

Mr. Moto sat at a table with a telephone in front of him, drinking tea. "No more news than yesterday," he said. "So sorry. And how is Mr. Pender?"

"He knows a lot about liberal politicians. I've been doing some thinking this morning."

"I hope so much that you will tell me the results."

"I think we'd better pick up Big Ben," Jack Rhyce said. "I'm sorry. I hate to break up an apparatus."

"No one has seen him. He is hiding very carefully."

"Not so carefully," Jack said. "I think we're overrating our boy. He called Miss Bogart this morning. He wants to make a date with her. She said she'd call him back at three."

Mr. Moto shook his head. "I do not like it," he said. "It does not sound correct. I wish Miss Bogart would give us the telephone number. We could have traced it by this time."

"I told you she wouldn't, and I decided not to put pressure on her. The fact is she may be highly useful in picking up Big Ben. She'll call him any time we want."

"If we knew the telephone number," Mr. Moto said, "we could be watching and take him when he receives the call."

"I don't think our chances would be good. He's a professional—he would be on the lookout. We're safer to let Miss Bogart make a date with him."

Mr. Moto nodded slowly. "I am inclined to agree with you. Miss Bogart is a very intelligent girl who has had training in

handling these matters. I shall come to the hotel at a quarter before three."

"Trace the call, then, if you want, but let's catch him where he's waiting for Miss Bogart. It will be safer that way. And I want to be along when you pick him up—just out of interest, Mr. Moto."

JACK RHYCE had played a part in several similar actions in America and Europe. The details seldom varied. Find your man and keep him at a given spot. Get the group distributed. Have the car ready. Close in simultaneously from all sides. If properly executed, there would hardly be a ripple of a struggle. Often pedestrians ten feet away did not notice the group around the victim, trussed and pinioned, being half pushed, half carried to the waiting car. Even if things did not move quite as planned, a well-placed blow at the back of the skull could solve the difficulty. Big Ben was a big man, but he could be handled. Jack Rhyce was certain that there would be no trouble if he were in the party.

By the time he and Mr. Moto reached the hotel, the preliminary preparations were in hand; the equipment immediately necessary was packed in Mr. Moto's brief case. When Ruth saw it she smiled a thin, Mona Lisa smile. Jack had never seen her looking prettier.

"So you boys need me, do you?" she said. "All right, rig up the telephone."

Mr. Moto took the wire-tapping instruments out of his brief case and attached them. He handed Jack Rhyce a pair of ear-phones.

"It is three o'clock," Ruth said. "Perhaps—if you are ready—I'd better make the call?"

"No," Jack said. "Let him sweat it out for ten minutes."

He never forgot that interval of waiting, or how happy Ruth looked. "Jack," she said, "you're glad I'm along now, aren't you?"

"Yes," he answered, "at the moment, Ruth."

"It's nice to know I'm useful, under the proper circumstances," she said. "Maybe that's all any woman wants."

"Excuse the question," Mr. Moto said. "Do you carry a black-jack, Mr. Rhyce?"

"No, I haven't one with me."

Mr. Moto reached inside his brief case. "If you will permit, it will be a pleasure to present you with this one. It may be useful."

Jack balanced the instrument expertly in his hand before he slipped it into his back pocket.

"Thanks," he said. "I'll do my best to be neat and clean."

"I'm sure," Mr. Moto said. "And now perhaps Miss Bogart should call. Let us not have the gentleman too discouraged."

She gave the number, and there followed a moment of suspense until they heard the answering voice. There was no doubt in the world that it was Big Ben.

"Gosh, honey," he said, and his voice was plaintive, "I've been settin' here. I mighty near thought it was a brush-off."

"Oh, Ben, I'm sorry, but I couldn't call until I was alone."

"You mean he's hanging around you now?" Big Ben asked.

"Ben, I told you I was tired of him, and he's gone now."

"Well, don't forget you're my girl now, honey. How about around six tonight?"

She glanced questioningly at Mr. Moto.

"Why, that would be lovely, Ben," she said. "Will you call for me at the hotel?"

There was a silence on the other end of the wire.

"Why, honey," he said, "I had some trouble there, last time I was in Tokyo. The folks there don't like me too much. How about going down to the Ginza and meeting me outside the Cimaroon beer hall? It's a GI place, with good food and singing and everything. I'll be waiting by the front entrance, come six o'clock."

"But, Ben dear, I don't know this town."

"I'm going to see personally that you're going to know it and love it before you're through, honey," he said. "It's no trouble to get there. Any taxi driver can take you to the Cimaroon."

"Well, then you be right outside," she said. "It's spooky being in a place where you don't know the language or anything. Are you sure you'll be there, Ben dear?"

"Sure as hell isn't freezing. Don't forget—the Cimaroon."

The conversation was over.

"How did I do?" she asked.

"You did fine," Jack said. "Don't you think so, Moto?"

Mr. Moto was dismantling the wire-tapping device. "It is not for me to analyze the Western mind, but he gave me the impression that he wanted so very greatly to see Miss Bogart. The

Cimarron is a suitable place for him to select. It should not be difficult to take him quickly if he is waiting on the sidewalk. I must be leaving now to make arrangements. The car and driver will take you there, Mr. Rhyce. May I ask you to arrive at half past five?"

"Let's make it five fifteen," Jack said. "These Joes have second thoughts, and get careful and early sometimes."

"And what about me?" Ruth asked. "Am I going with you?"

"Certainly not," Jack said quickly. "There won't be any need, Ruth."

"If he doesn't see me, he may not show," she said.

It seemed safe to discount that possibility. Jack was experiencing a feeling almost of peace. As far as he could see, the Japan assignment was drawing to a close. If the ending was not wholly satisfactory, it was effective. His main mission had been Big Ben. He took the blackjack from his hip pocket, tossed it in the air and caught it.

"You'll only be in the way if there's any kind of hassel," he said. "He's a big boy, and he may muss things up."

"I think Mr. Rhyce is correct," Mr. Moto said. "I am most grateful to you, Miss Bogart, and it would be so nice if I could pay you my respects when this is over. Perhaps a Japanese supper to-night just with me and Mr. Rhyce. At five fifteen, then, Mr. Rhyce, and thank you very much."

The feeling that everything was over persisted after Mr. Moto had gone—the easing of tensions he had experienced before when a job was almost finished, and everything was in the groove.

"I feel pretty good on the whole," he said to her. "When we get him, we can move out of here and head for home."

Her expression brightened. "It can't be soon enough for me. And why can't we start being ourselves when we get on that plane?"

"I don't see why we can't from there on in," he answered.

"What do you mean?" she asked. "From there on in?"

"A lot of things," he said, "and we ought to be able to start discussing them as soon as I get back here."

"Do you mean you still love me?" she asked.

"It's unprofessional, but I do," he said. "Come to think of it, I wouldn't have missed any of this."

"Jack," she said, "what's going to happen to him?"

"He's not our problem. The Japs will take him over. We might

have gone further into this if Bill Gibson hadn't died, but I think it's time now to stop this show."

"It's sticky, letting the Japs take him," she said. "I wish you and I weren't in it. You're too nice for it, and maybe I am, too."

"I wouldn't be surprised," he told her, "but let's put our minds on pulling out of here tomorrow, Ruth."

The interval before his departure for the Cimarron always remained in his memory as a domestic sort of scene.

"If you want something to do while I'm out you might start packing," he said.

"Jack," she said, "don't you think you ought to wear something heavier and darker than that seersucker coat?"

"I don't think so. This won't be night work."

"I wish you were carrying a gun. Wouldn't you like to borrow my fountain-pen gadget?"

"I can do fine with this jack," he said.

"You ought not to wear crepe-soled shoes," she said. "You might slip. I don't know whether you ever knew Bobby Burke. He slipped making a swing at Oscar Ertz—you know, the Czech—just outside the Gare du Nord in Paris. He had a knife in him before he could recover."

"These shoes are skidproof. No, I never did know Bob, but I've heard plenty about him. Ought I to be jealous?"

"Darling," she said, "you won't ever need to be jealous. Now let me take a look at you. You look awfully handsome."

"So do you," he said. It was time to be going, but he did not want to leave her.

"Jack, if you do hit him, follow through. Let him have it all. He's an awfully big man. Now you'd better kiss me good-by. I don't want you to be late."

"Don't forget Moto's coming to take us to dinner when we get back," he said. "I wish we were going alone. We haven't had much fun here, what with one thing and another."

"Oh," she said, "there'll be lots of other times. Take care, Jack, please take care."

He had a final glimpse of her before he closed the door. She was standing, smiling, very straight and neat, and looking very happy.

THE TASTE of the American GI was responsible for most of the innovations along the Ginza. They reflected the immaturities of

youth—naturally enough, since the age average was low in the American armed forces. In fact, Jack Rhyce thought the Cimarron offered everything that he would have wanted when he was an undergraduate at Oberlin—air-conditioning, cold beer on draft, an enormous gaudy bar, a jazz orchestra, a Japanese torch singer, and dozens of tables with pretty Japanese hostesses.

At five fifteen the Cimarron was already full. The brash notes of the orchestra, the high voice of the singer and the chatter of the patrons would be an excellent background for a shot, if a shot were necessary. It could easily be minutes before anyone would know what had happened. He checked the entrances and exits. These were limited to a wide entrance on the street, and two doors in back leading to service quarters.

Mr. Moto was waiting at a wall table, facing the door. He waved to Jack. "Beer, of course?" he said. "Everyone is posted."

"Have you looked for him all through this building?"

"Oh, yes," Mr. Moto said. "No sign."

"I'm just wondering whether he will be hiding until he sees her. Maybe we were wrong in not having her drive up."

Mr. Moto thought for a few moments. "It is not too late," he said. "We might call her, from the manager's office."

The office was a cubbyhole only a few paces from where they were sitting, and it was startlingly silent, once they had closed the door. She answered almost immediately.

"Ruth, we've got a second thought," he said. "Maybe you'd better take a taxi and come here at six o'clock. Get out and stand by the main entrance."

"Okay," she said. "It's nice that great minds think alike sometimes. I'll be there."

He felt a momentary qualm as they returned to the table, because he disliked revising a plan on such short notice. Any revision always presented a new set of factors. Yet he had not the slightest premonition that he had made an error until it was six o'clock and there was no sign of Ruth outside the Cimarron.

"There is traffic," Mr. Moto said. "Do not let it upset you for five more minutes, Mr. Rhyce."

He had believed that experience had made him immune to sudden reverses—but he had not felt a shock of helpless panic for years comparable to what he experienced then. Everyone went wrong sometime, he said to himself, and this was it for him.

"I'd better telephone and see if she's left," he said.

When he reached the manager's office and gave the number, his hands shook. He had never in his life wished for anything so vehemently as that he might hear her voice, but there was no answer. She had gone. Outside the office he was startled at the sight of his own face, reflected from one of the wall mirrors.

"I think they've double-crossed us," he said.

Mr. Moto looked grave. "Wait. We gain nothing by hurrying. Remember that you made her wait ten minutes, only not to appear too prompt. She may be doing this—and remember one thing more."

"What's that?"

"I am to blame as much as you are, Mr. Rhyce. And what is it they say in America? The show must go on."

He did not like the appraising look in Mr. Moto's eyes. After all, he was representing the Intelligence of his country. "Damn it," he said. "Don't you tell me how to behave." He stood up. "I'm going back to the hotel. It's the place to start from, isn't it?"

"Yes, that will be the proper procedure," Mr. Moto said. "I shall go with you. They have won this game. He was brighter than we thought him."

It was accepted practice on any battlefield to draw opponents to one spot, and then to strike in another. They sat in rigid silence until they were slowed by the traffic at the Zimbashi station.

"I'm so very sorry," Mr. Moto said.

The remark jangled against the raw edges of Jack's nerves.

"To hell with it," he said. "Do you think they got her in the room or outside?"

"It would be the room, I think," Mr. Moto answered.

He was relieved by that opinion because, if true, his asking her to join them was not responsible for what had happened. The car turned in the drive of the Imperial Hotel, and the lotus pool and the low building looked as ugly as his thoughts.

"Let us not appear too worried," Mr. Moto said. "I shall ask a question or two and join you in your room. I think we had better set up the telephone again, because they will be making contact with you, allowing only time for your return from the Cimaroon. Why else would they have caught her, Mr. Rhyce?"

What had come over him not to have thought of it before? He should have taken suitable precautions. He had been drawn off

as easily as though he had been the third team. What had happened that had made them able to outguess him? At some point something had occurred to give away the show. It might have been that night in the Main Bar, or it might have been that morning in the office of Harry Pender. Some detail had gone wrong, and it was futile to guess what it might have been. Play as safe as possible all across the board was another maxim of the business, and he had disobeyed it by not having her room guarded. Neither his mind nor hers had been on their work. They had been thinking about the outside.

He never forgot the appearance of her room. Everything was exactly as he had anticipated. The lock of the door had been forced by an instrument that had made it give immediately. The only sign of struggle was an overturned suitcase that had fallen from the bed to the floor. Her handbag was gone. There was the faint scent of the perfume she used, and the bottle was still on her dressing table beside her gold-backed comb and brush. He picked up the brush and gazed at the initials on the back, R.B. She had started packing, and her dresses and lingerie that had fallen from the overturned suitcase still showed signs of careful folding. Mr. Moto came in while he was holding one of her dresses. Jack Rhyce laid it down gently.

"They were not seen to leave," Mr. Moto said, "but then, no one was watching. We should have taken measures, but the conversation on the telephone sounded so very true. I am so sorry. I am also very much ashamed."

"You and me both," Jack Rhyce said. "Sorry and ashamed."

Mr. Moto, having adjusted the broken lock so that the door would close, opened his brief case.

"The telephone," he said. "We must both listen, I think."

"I don't see why you're so sure they'll call," Jack said.

"Please, it is inevitable. They would not have taken her otherwise. I am having the call traced, but I fear it will not help. They are so very clever. They know you are in love with her, Mr. Rhyce."

The words came out brutally in the ravaged room, and Jack felt his face grow brick red, but he had no right to be angry because of his stupidity.

"It was a mistake," he said. "We both knew it."

"Please, I am not criticizing," Mr. Moto said. "It may be

a mistake, but sometimes one cannot help them, Mr. Rhyce."

It was infuriating to have something which should have belonged only to him and her tossed out in the open to be used as a point in a game. Mr. Moto's voice was silkily smooth.

"I do not wish to offend," he said. "I only speak because I think you should be ready. I think they will be prepared to make you an interesting proposal, Mr. Rhyce."

Jack gave a start. "What sort?" he asked.

"I do not know, but I think you have come close to finding something that worries them, Mr. Rhyce."

Mr. Moto's words aroused a suspicion in Jack Rhyce that gripped him with icy fingers. He cleared his throat.

"Do you think they're going to propose a swap?" he asked.

"I believe they will offer to bring Miss Bogart safely back if you will agree to leave here."

Jack felt a spasm in the pit of his stomach and his heart was beating faster. Mr. Moto was watching him carefully. He resented the detached critical manner and the air of academic curiosity. Mr. Moto was weighing him in an Oriental balance.

"You will have to make a decision as to whether to leave or to stay," he said, "and I am so very much afraid I cannot help you, Mr. Rhyce."

"Damn you," he said, and the sound of his voice warned him that he must compose himself, "you don't have to help me."

Mr. Moto watched him without moving a muscle. Just then the telephone rang. The small bell had a mocking sound. Mr. Moto slipped the earphones over his head.

When Jack picked up the phone he was steadier. "Hello," he said. His voice was even and agreeable. He was playing the old game of wits.

"Hello." He recognized the voice on the other end of the line immediately. "That's you, isn't it, Jack?"

"Indeed it is," he said affably.

"This is Harry Pender. You recognize my voice, don't you?"

"Well, well, Harry. It's nice of you to give me a ring. I sure do recognize your voice. I'd know it anywhere."

"Okay, Jack. Then let's cut out the monkey business. You and I won't have to do our clowning from now on in."

"Thanks. That's a big relief. What's on your mind?"

"We've got Ruth Bogart here. I thought you'd like to know."

Though he had anticipated it, he found it hard to control himself, and the instant while he struggled for calmness could not have been lost on Mr. Pender. "Thanks for letting me know," he said. "I was beginning to be worried about her."

There was a good-natured laugh on the other end of the wire.

"We thought you might be. Well, take it easy, Jack. She's right here, and we wish you were, too. She's happy and comfortable as of now. I'll let you speak to her in a minute."

"Why, thanks," Jack said, "thanks a lot."

He heard Harry laugh again. "You know who I am, don't you, Jack? I mean you've got me taped by now?"

"Yes," Jack said, "I've got a pretty good idea."

Harry Pender's laugh was excited. He was obviously on edge.

"I may as well admit," he said, "that I was pretty dumb regarding you. All of us were. In fact, we never got wise to you until lunchtime today. Nice going, Jack."

"Thanks for the compliment," he said.

"When I heard you'd been looking at the bookshops, I admit, I should have taken the news more seriously. Maybe you'd still be fooling me, if it hadn't been for a guy who just blew in here, by the name of Skirov. Remember him, Jack?"

"I can't say that I remember him exactly. I don't think I ever saw him, but I'm sure I'd recognize him."

"Well, he remembers you, boy. He saw you in Moscow back in '46. He was a waiter at one of those big parties, and passed you caviar. Just as soon as I described you he clicked. You were talking to Molotov. You were saying all men are brothers."

Never try to be conspicuous, the Chief had said.

"Let's cut out the hamming and get to the point," Jack said.

"All right, Jack." Harry spoke soothingly. "We didn't want Bill Gibson around, and we don't want you, either. Do you get my drift?"

"Is it a threat or a promise, Harry?"

"It's neither. It's a firm offer that we're making."

His eyes encountered Mr. Moto's half-inquisitive, half-blank stare. He felt as though a cord were being drawn tight about his head. Anybody in the business could have told what was coming.

"Go ahead and make it," he said. "I've got an open mind."

It came in mild, insinuating tones.

"You're fond of Ruth, aren't you, Jack? You wouldn't want to

have her go through any kind of drill, would you? She wouldn't be much fun to see afterward, would she? And you know, they do keep alive—surprisingly often—don't you, Jack?"

Jack Rhyce tried to laugh. It would have been shameful if he had betrayed his pain. "I understand your build-up. Why don't you get to the point?" he said.

"Don't get mad," Harry Pender said. "The point is, we're busy, and we don't want you monkeying around. We want you out of here. How does that sound, Jack?"

He felt his heart beat faster. "If you want it straight," he said, "I don't like this town much, or the folks in it, including you."

"Now you're talking. I had an idea we could get together, Jack. You'd like to have Ruth back at the hotel tonight, safe and sound, and you know what I mean by safe and sound, don't you? If not, there's a pal of yours named Big Ben who might explain. Would you like to talk with Ben, Jack?"

He could hear Big Ben singing at the other end of the wire. He was singing "Every Day Is Ladies' Day With Me." Jack Rhyce put his hand to his forehead. His face had grown damp, but he kept his voice steady.

"Let's cut out the technique," he said. "Consider you've scared hell out of me. Yes, I'd like Ruth back safe and sound. So what's the proposition?"

"It's easy." Harry Pender's voice was warm and enthusiastic. "Half an hour from now Ruth will be knocking at your door. There's a night flight leaving for Honolulu at eleven, and we have two tickets for you free. Merely pack your bags, and shut up and go to the airport. How do you like that, Jack?"

"It sounds wonderful," he said. "And how do I know we'll ever get to the airport, Harry?"

"You've got to trust us for that, just the way we're going to trust you. Give me your word—you communicate with no one from the minute you set down that telephone, and Ruth will be back with you in half an hour, with a boy from our office to expedite your passage. How does it sound? Would you like to speak to Ruth?"

"Yes," he said. There was a pause. He was trying to think of some way out. Then he heard her voice, and it was excruciating agony to hear it. Her voice was faint and level.

"Hello, Jack."

"Ruth," he asked, "are you all right?"

"I'm all right, Jack," she said, "but don't do it. Don't—" Her voice was choked off in a stifled gasp that ended in a scream.

Mr. Moto was watching him. Jack could not tell whether his expression was one of sympathy or surprise. He knew his own expression had revealed pain. Harry was back on the wire.

"Will you take the proposition, or won't you?"

"Suppose I don't?" Jack Rhyce asked.

"We'll handle you anyway. Give us twenty minutes and Ruth will tell us what you know. Won't you, Ruth?"

Jack felt a wave of nausea sweep over him, and he set down the telephone. There was one thing certain—she did not know enough. He sank down in a chair, drew out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead. The telephone rang again.

"Let it ring," he said. For a moment he felt as though he were going to be sick. "Take those damn earphones off. Excuse me. I'll be all right in a minute." He felt his shoulders move convulsively and he hid his face in his hands.

"That is quite all right," Mr. Moto said. "Would you like a little whiskey, Mr. Rhyce?"

Jack shook his head.

"You didn't think I'd do it, did you?" he said.

"No, I did not. Please be easier in your mind, for you did what you should have, Mr. Rhyce."

"How in hell can I be easy in my mind," he said, "when we should have put a guard here?"

"It is something that we will regret always—you more than I," Mr. Moto said. "But in life we cannot relive regrets."

"That's right," Jack said. "I'm all right now."

He was far from all right. He knew he would never be the man he had been an hour before. There were certain things that could haunt one always, but he had to keep moving ahead, and try to make what was happening to Ruth to some extent worth while.

His training had not left him. He had learned long ago not to forget words or pauses on a telephone.

"Pender said a boy from the office, didn't he?" Jack Rhyce said. "That was a slip, I think."

"I'm not quite sure that I follow you," Mr. Moto answered. Jack's mind was moving forward to another fact.

"We know that Skirov is in town," he said. "That's another

mistake of Pender's. Maybe we can connect with him now. Anyway, there's no use hanging around here."

"No," Mr. Moto answered. "We must go to where the call came from. They will have gone, but there may be traces."

"I wouldn't do that," Jack said. His mind was moving forward out of the nightmare of self-incrimination that had entangled it. He remembered the accelerated swing of the glasses in Mr. Pender's hand that morning when he had pursued the subject of liberal politicians.

All that Intelligence consisted of was finding facts, evaluating them and fitting them together, and there were times when you had to leave the path of painfully accumulated evidence to play a hunch. All he had was a hunch. He was prepared to play it because it was better to move than to do nothing.

"Did you ever hear of a man named Noshimura Hata?" he said.

"Oh, yes, I know Mr. Hata. Where did you hear of him, please?"

"In Mr. Pender's office, this morning. Pender said he was head and shoulders above any other politician in the liberal party, and afterward I think he was sorry he had said it."

"So—?" Mr. Moto said. "Tell me what you think."

"I think they were going to kill Mr. Hata tomorrow—but now I think they will do it tonight, now that I didn't take their offer. I'd get him out of his house, if I were you. I'd be delighted to wait there for whoever is coming to do the job, and I'll bet it will be Big Ben."

Mr. Moto was on his feet. "I think that is a very nice suggestion, Mr. Rhyce. Let me have the telephone."

"It's only a guess, you know," Jack Rhyce said.

"Yes, but one must always guess," Mr. Moto answered. "I shall be there with you to wait for whoever may be coming."

Jack Rhyce had a friendlier feeling for Mr. Moto than any he had previously experienced.

Mr. Moto spoke over the telephone in Japanese. Jack stood for a moment listening. As he listened, his anguish, which had been dulled for the last few minutes, returned. He knew that it would be with him always. He walked to the overturned suitcase and replaced the tumbled-out clothing. He picked up the comb and brush and perfume bottle, and put them in the suitcase. He

touched his lips to the back of the brush, and he did not care whether Mr. Moto saw him or not. He closed the suitcase and snapped the lock, and knew that he was doing all he ever could for Ruth Bogart.

Chapter 10

AGAIN it was the old matter of waiting. Again it was the trap or ambush. But this time there was a feeling of promise in the air. Jack knew as sure as fate that things were going to work that night. If you sacrificed enough you were bound to get something in return, and the only thing that he wanted just then was to see the job through, and meet Big Ben in the process. He had paid enough for the privilege. For the rest of his natural life he had given up peace of mind. Even though she had told him to go ahead—and her voice and her scream would echo in his memory always—he would wonder whether duty had been worth it. Ever afterward his ingenuity would work on plans that might have saved her and still have achieved what they were there for.

As it turned out later, the prognosis was correct that the plan for assassination would look like an American job. The only thing that gave Jack a shock was the wallet subsequently discovered on the premises: it purported to be his, and contained excellently forged identity papers. They had said that they would handle him, and they had meant it.

The house and grounds of the Hata family stood in one of Tokyo's most desirable districts, on land not far from the Palace grounds. Mr. Hata had been carried to a safe spot before Mr. Moto and he made their appearance, and the servants had been replaced by agents. Rigorous precautions were taken in case the house was watched; the usual household routine was followed faithfully. The operation had been planned with a smoothness that impressed Jack Rhyce.

It was half past eight once he and Mr. Moto were inside the house. Mr. Hata's retiring hour was ten.

"First he walks through the garden," Mr. Moto said, "having put on the kimono and recited Buddhist prayers. I shall be Mr. Hata, and you may watch me from the house. We must be very careful, but I do not think the killing will be in the garden."

The austere charm of that house formed a violent contrast to Jack Rhyce's thoughts. The sparseness of its furnishings, the bare space of its walls gave a balanced beauty to its interior. There were no furnishings except the bedding prepared for the night, a black lacquer headrest, a low table and a scroll painting in a niche with an arrangement of flowers beneath it. The outer wall was formed of sliding glass panels which had been pushed back so that the back garden was a projection of the room itself. The garden was small, but assiduous art gave the illusion of its being a Japanese countryside. The lawn was a plain, the carefully twisted pines and small deciduous trees that bordered it were wind-swept forests. The eroded stones were mountains. The garden spelled peace, but it did not give Jack peace of mind.

The business had taught him the patience of a fisherman or a hunter, who could be alerted at any second. The business demanded an endurance that raised the watcher beyond self, to a realm where personal consideration meant nothing. He had not been restless, but his thoughts were beyond control. He was back again looking at the suitcase that had tumbled on the floor. He tortured himself with what might have been, with how she had looked on that long drive to the mountains, with what she had said when they were at Wake, and finally with the knowledge that everything was ended. He could not think of what was happening to her now, or speculate on whether she was alive or dead. It was best to know that it was absolutely ended.

He was waiting in a corner of the sleeping room when Mr. Moto stepped through the windows from the garden. In the air there was a telepathic sense of something already moving.

"When the garden lights go out," Mr. Moto said, "I shall ask you to step outside, and stand by the corner of the house. I shall rest on the bed. I think he will approach through the garden. When he is near enough you may move on him, but please wait until he is near, for we do not wish shooting."

"Don't worry. I have only the jack you gave me."

"It is so much better," Mr. Moto said. "There are others here who will take the further steps if necessary. If he enters this garden or this house, I do not think he will get away."

"That's fine with me. There's only one thing I want."

"Yes?" Mr. Moto said. "What is that, Mr. Rhyce?"

"Let me handle him. I want him to know I'm here."

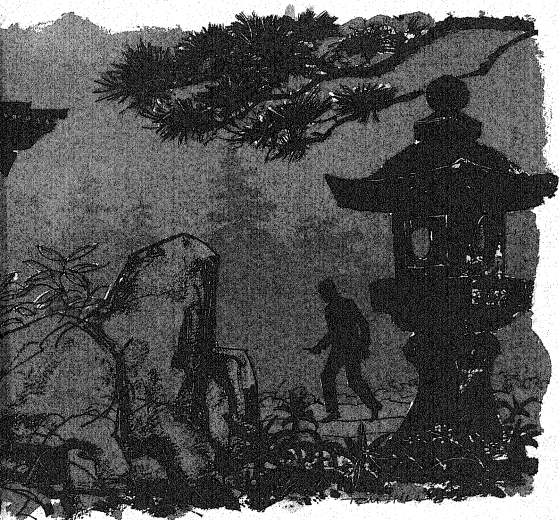


"It will be a pleasure," Mr. Moto said, "if he comes through the garden and not through the house, when he will be my responsibility, Mr. Rhyce."

"Even so, I'd like him to know I'm here."

He had learned how to take cover as skillfully as any jungle fighter. When the lights were out he blended into the shadows by the angle of the house so completely that he was a part of the shrubbery.

The night was as warm as a Burmese rain forest, but drier, and the glow of the city's lights was reflected in the sky. The ground and the house were silent in spite of the sounds of the great city that rose all around them. A stirring of the bushes near



the driveway revealed the presence of one of the guards, and Jack Rhyce could hear a whisper of breeze in the pine trees. . . .

The approach was made with such care and deliberation that Jack Rhyce had heard the first sound fully ten minutes before Big Ben slipped through the bushes at the far end of the garden and began his walk across the lawn toward the bedroom ell. He moved with a noiseless confidence which showed he was familiar with the house and grounds. Once he was on the lawn the background of the trees and shrubbery, combined with the lights reflected in the sky, made him stand out clearly. He wore a seersucker suit. He would have been an easy target for a pistol with a silencer, Jack Rhyce was thinking, and he was glad that the idea had not

crossed Mr. Moto's mind. He wanted Big Ben to know that he was there.

Ben was drawing nearer, lazily, gracefully. When he was a few yards from the house he reached in his side pocket, drew out a knife and switched open the blade carelessly. Jack Rhyce coughed gently, but loudly enough to hold the other motionless. Then before Big Ben could move, he was on top of him and his blackjack had struck the knife out of the hand holding it. Big Ben took a step backward; he must have known in that second that he could not get away. Jack Rhyce spoke softly.

"It's me, Ben. It's Jack."

"Hello, you gumshoe artist. That girl of yours was pretty good, but she didn't last for long." He laughed.

The words robbed Jack Rhyce of his judgment. He had told himself long ago that it would be unsafe to close with Big Ben, yet that was what he did; and before he could get a wrestling hold Ben had him by the throat. The thought flashed through him that his neck would be broken in seconds. He was in luck to be close enough to bring up his knee before Big Ben moved clear, but he had to strike again before the hold relaxed. There was a vicious moment when they rolled together on the ground. He could feel Ben's thumbs groping for his eyes. He rolled free and was on his feet while Big Ben was still on hands and knees. He delivered a kick to the side of the bleeding head, and Big Ben rolled over on his face. Then he felt arms holding him, and he heard Mr. Moto speak.

"That is enough, Mr. Rhyce. You can leave him to the others now. It would be so much nicer if you were not killing. Perhaps you would feel unhappy about it later. Americans are such sentimental people."

"He's not half dead," he said.

"No," Mr. Moto answered, "but my men are very conscientious."

The thing was over and now Jack had to move on. "All right," he said. "That's one down. Now let's go and get Skirov."

He heard the sharp intake of Mr. Moto's breath. "But where is Skirov?"

Although it was only a hunch, it was based on a line of reasoning. Skirov, who always kept in the background, would be in a quiet place where he would be in communication but removed

from the center of trouble. "It's only a guess," Jack Rhyce said. "I believe he's in Pender's office in the Asia Friendship League."

"And what makes you think that?" Mr. Moto asked.

"Do you remember Pender on the telephone? He was too damned elated. He was talking about a boy from the office seeing us off for the airport. I think he made a slip when he used the word 'office.'"

"It would be a pleasure to try," Mr. Moto said. "I think, Mr. Rhyce, that you are a very clever man."

Chapter 11

"SO HE JUMPED out the window?" the Chief asked.

"Yes, sir," Jack Rhyce answered. "Eight stories, from Mr. Pender's office in the Asia Friendship League."

"You're sure he was Skirov?" the Chief asked.

"Yes, sir. His fingerprints checked with Mr. Moto's records. I have them with me, sir."

"Moto," the Chief said. "That's not a name. It's a suffix."

"Yes," Jack answered. "That's what Bill Gibson told me."

Less than forty-eight hours previously he had been in Tokyo, and now he had the feeling experienced by other air passengers, that some part of him had been left behind, and this illusion was sharper than it had ever been before. After other trips, the Chief's office had seemed like a threshold to rest and safety; but now it extended no such welcome.

"Gibson," the Chief said. "That's a tough one. It's no fun hearing that people you've trained and been fond of are gone. It's no fun because you can't do anything except send out more. Maybe you'll face it yourself sometime. I'm not going to hold down this desk forever, Buster."

At another time, the open hint that he was in line would have awakened a thrill of pleasure. "I don't think Bill had a hard time, sir," he said. "I'm afraid it was different for Miss Bogart."

The Chief picked up a pencil and tapped it softly on his desk. "I've often wished this business were not coeducational," he said, "but then the score more than makes the trip pay off. We can scratch Skirov and Big Ben, but what's your evidence on Pender?"

"The word of Mr. Moto, and there was a piece in the paper

just before I left that Pender was run over by a truck in Tokyo."

"It's a queer thing," the Chief said. "I used to be something of a specialist on the prewar Orient, but I never heard of this Moto."

"You might have missed him because he was abroad. From what he said, he would have been some sort of embassy attaché. I can fill out the description and get it in the works."

"Yes," the Chief said. "We ought to get more of a line on him. I'd almost like to hop a plane and go over and take a look at him."

"You'd find it hard to come up with him, sir. I don't think he'd have appeared at all if he hadn't set me down for Big Ben."

He was no longer being two things at once, as he sat in the Chief's office. He was not a do-gooder, enamored of an American girl whose profile he could not forget, whose hands were strong and delicate, whose loyalty and humor were impeccable.

"He sounds like a right guy," the Chief said.

"I'd say he's from the nobility or in the high-officer class, and educated in America. But I'll get it all down in my report."

"Well," the Chief said, "that's enough for a quick runover. Are there any other loose ends?"

"That's all, sir, except for disposing of Miss Bogart's personal effects. They're outside now."

"I'll attend to them," the Chief said. "That's one of the tough things about where I sit, Jack."

"By the way, sir, I suppose Ruth Bogart is a cover name?"

"The Ruth's real, the Bogart isn't. If I were you, I'd only be inquisitive when you're asked to be, Buster."

He appreciated the Chief's reproof, but also he resented it.

"When you've been in the business ten years," he said, "and have all your personality knocked out of you on the road, even so sometimes you can't help being interested if you have to throw in with someone for a while. Occasionally, you can't help being human."

From where he sat the Chief had frequently had to deal with temperament. He understood better than most psychiatrists the inevitable results of long repressions. "You're looking tired, Jack. I know you've had it rough," he said, "but I know you, and it's nothing that a couple of weeks off and some sleep won't fix."

His diagnosis could have been correct some weeks ago, but it was not right now. Something had happened the moment Jack Rhyce had seen the empty room in the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo.

office. You're in line to follow me here. You'd be like a fish out of water, on the outside."

He was aware that what the Chief said was true. He had intended to think it over, but instead it was done already.

"I've got reasons, sir," he said.

"All right," the Chief said. "Just name the reasons."

Jack Rhyce squared his shoulders.

"After what happened over there I could never be the man I used to be. Being with her made me too human, Chief, and when you get too human you get fallible, and when you get to thinking about the outside you get forgetful. Part of me's back there. I've lost something, and I'll never get it back."

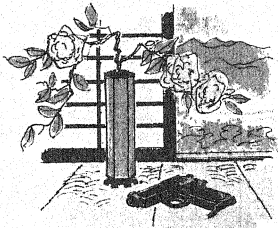
The Chief was also on his feet. "You're talking off the top of your head," he said.

"You may be right, sir, but she wanted me on the outside. She asked me to promise."

"Jack," the Chief said, "you're going through what everyone in the outfit goes through periodically. Something chips off you every time you go through anything, but you're the kind it only makes sharper. I'll make you a bet: in a week or so you'll want to stay in the business on account of her. I just want two promises from you. Don't say anything to anyone about this talk, and don't make a decision until you've had two weeks away somewhere."

"All right," Jack said, "if that's the way you want it."

He felt closer to her, now that he had spoken, than he had since she had gone. He knew as sure as fate that he was not coming back.



"Even if I rest up," he said, "I'm afraid I'll still stay human, Chief. I won't be the old smooth-running machine again."

The Chief smiled tolerantly. "Listen, Buster," he said, "you're in no shape to analyze yourself. What you need is a shot in the arm and sleep. Never mind putting anything in the works until tomorrow afternoon."

"Very well, sir," Jack said, and he pushed back his chair. "Only one thing else. I'd appreciate it if you could see your way clear to giving me her photograph."

The Chief raised his eyebrows and let his pencil drop to the desk, and the minute disorderly sound was an adequate measure of his surprise.

"So that's the way it was?" he said. "I'm sorry for you, son."

Jack Rhyce was glad that the thing was in the open for once, and it would only be for once. "That's the way it was," he said. "We fell in love like a couple of kids. We both knew it was a damn-fool thing to do, but it didn't spoil the operation, Chief."

"She wouldn't have wanted it to," the Chief said. "She was a very good girl, Jack."

"She wanted me to go ahead," he said. "She told me to, over the telephone. Anyway, we couldn't have found her in time."

"You didn't tell me she spoke to you," the Chief said.

"I left it out," Jack answered. "Maybe I should have this time. It's something that belongs to her and me. As I was saying, sometimes you can't help being human, Chief."

He was talking too much and he despised self-pity.

"I'll tell you all about her someday," the Chief said, "but I don't believe now is quite the time."

"If it's just the same to you, I'd rather not know any more about her, except what belonged to us. I admit it wasn't very much."

He stood up. He had not intended to speak his mind, but that brief talk about her had crystallized his thoughts.

"We didn't have many opportunities to talk, but we both decided that we'd go back to the outside when we came home. She isn't here, but I'm going, anyway, sir."

"Now, wait," the Chief began, "this is all on the spur of the moment. Is it anything I said that made you come up with this?"

"No, sir. But I'm going to hand in my resignation."

"Now, Jack, you can't do that. You're the best man in the

John P. Marquand



TWO WEEKS after John P. Marquand graduated from Harvard in 1915, he joined the *Boston Transcript* as a reporter. His brief career in journalism, and even briefer one as an advertising copy writer, terminated in 1921 when *The Saturday Evening Post* bought a short story of his, the second he had written. This sale marked the beginning of a long and fruitful association with that magazine, the first publisher of his "Mr. Moto" stories.

While periodically recording Mr. Moto's adventures, Mr. Marquand was establishing his reputation as the foremost satirist of the New England social scene. In this field his first entry was *The Late George Apley*, which won the Pulitzer Prize for 1937, followed by *Wickford Point*, *H. M. Pulham, Esq.*, and half a dozen other best-selling novels.

Marquand has always written about people and backgrounds he knows. *Stopover: Tokyo* stemmed from his extensive travels in the Orient. Many of the novels on which his reputation is based were set in the Massachusetts scenes which have been familiar to him since childhood. His active service in two World Wars furnished background for *Melville Goodwin, USA* (Condensed Books, Winter 1952), and his experience with the successful Broadway versions of *The Late George Apley* and *Point of No Return* resulted in the authentic theater atmosphere of *Women and Thomas Harrow* (Condensed Books, Autumn 1958).

Mr. Marquand's home is at Newburyport, Massachusetts, where Marquands have lived for more than two hundred years.